Mrs. Shaw
with best wishes
from M. Quach

FIRST EPISTLE GENERAL OF ST. JOHN

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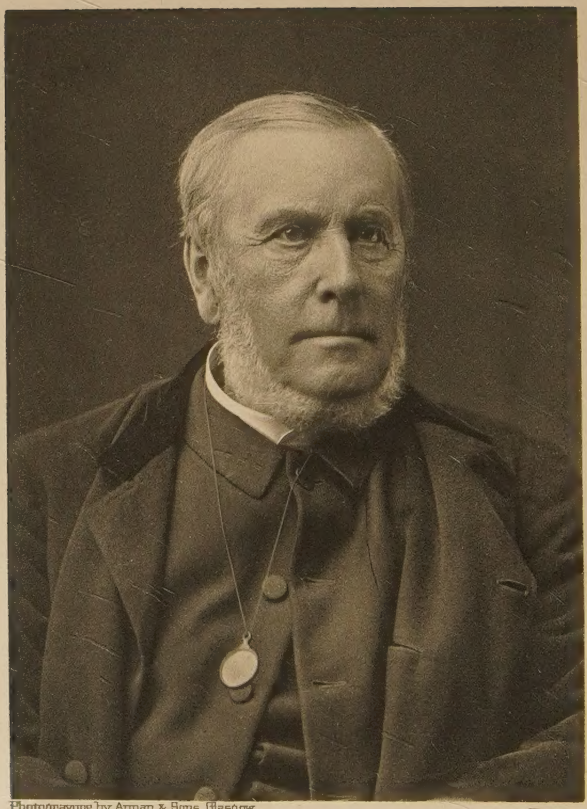

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Charles Walker

FIRST EPISTLE GENERAL OF ST. JOHN

NOTES OF LECTURES TO SERVE AS A

POPULAR COMMENTARY

BY

THE REV. CHARLES WATSON, D.D.

LARGS

SECOND EDITION, WITH BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

GLASGOW

JAMES MACLEHOSE AND SONS

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PREFACE.

THE title page sufficiently expresses the origin and purpose of this book.

It contains the notes of lectures first delivered more than forty years ago, and since then twice rewritten and preached.

There is much in the First Epistle of St. John which no man apart from apostolic authority could venture to say, and much left out of it which an apostle might have been expected to enforce. In writing upon it, therefore, the limits of his teaching must be strictly observed, and nothing given more or less than that which seems to be the meaning and force of the words of St. John.

When this book comes short of this, or goes beyond this, it misses its aim.

It is intended for popular use. An attempt

therefore has been made to avoid in it, as far as may be, the words which belong to technical theology, on the one hand, and on the other to the forms of speech very commonly used in the pulpit—the first, because few men know the meaning of these technical words; and the second, because the mere sound of familiar phrases satisfies the ear without rousing the understanding to make any effort towards grasping their force.

Although this Commentary does not profess to be "critical," all diligence has been used in it to catch the true sense of the terms used by St. John. Those who may wish to do this for themselves will find ample help in the Greek text of the Epistle as edited with notes by Dr. Westcott, the present Bishop of Durham. His are books which can scarcely be opened anywhere in vain.

It is surely important, at a time when, to use the words of Professor Milligan, "All the different branches of the Christian Church are anxiously longing for a deeper and more living theology than that left them by the Reformation, that the thought of St. John, and the manner in which the Lord Jesus Christ—the sum and substance of Christianity—is presented by him," should be

brought out as the perfectly safe foundation of such a theology.

It is in the hope that this book may meanwhile and so far serve towards this great end that it is now printed.

NORTHFIELD, LARGS,
April 22, 1891.

INTRODUCTION.

A NEW edition of Dr. Watson's *Lectures on the First Epistle of St. John* is brought out by the advice of some of his friends, who would greatly regret that they should be no longer available.

Some use may still be made of the records of his thought which remain in manuscript sermons and letters, but as he had given these Lectures the revision he considered necessary for publication, they are reproduced as he left them.

It would be impossible to attempt to speak here of the many appreciative notices of the Lectures on their publication—notices often from very unexpected quarters; or even to mention the numberless tributes of grateful respect and affection paid, when he passed away, by friends far and near, by brethren of his own and other churches, and by his faithful people and neighbours.

We have but just met with the irreparable loss of that most understanding and sympathetic of Dr. Watson's friends, from whom, had he been still with

us, some introduction might most naturally have been looked for here. On this account it may not be unsuitable to give the words with which Dr. Marcus Dods welcomed the book on its first appearance.

"By those who have known Dr. Watson's great ability, he has often been blamed for excessive modesty or a fastidiousness which has deprived the Church at large of the benefit of his thinking. Of the fizz of fireworks and the rattle of small arms we have had enough, and more than enough, but this heavier piece of ordnance has not once spoken. The utterance at length given justifies all delay. Ripeness shines from every page of this volume. This is its characteristic. Profound thoughts, piercing observations of human conduct, have been left to stand and settle until absolutely clarified, so that the volume presents us with that rarest combination, depth and pellucid clearness. They who seek for what is flashy and sensational must go elsewhere. Here there is no pretentious frippery, no striving to be wise or acute or pious or anything else, no hot-house forcing, but the mature fruits of nature's unhurried processes, perfected knowledge, mellow wisdom, a serene spirit, a style unobtrusive as light and as clear. Since Kingsley's *Sermons*, we have had no such pellucidly simple English. The language seems to fit the thought like a skin naturally grown out of it, not like a dress artificially made, and more or less disguising the thought. The thing that is to be said is

said at once, and finally. In this respect the book is a lesson to all who write ; the author believes rather in the power of the truth than in emphatic statements and what may be called literary swearing. Make the literary medium a perfect transparency, and the truth will assert its own power. And then, what a rebuke, to find in the end of this scrambling and scamping nineteenth century a volume without one chapter, one page, one sentence of padding. This is the reward of writing but one book in a life-time.

" As a popular commentary on 'First John,' nothing better can be desired. It is written in the key of the Epistle. The commentator has caught the spirit of his author. The meaning of the Epistle is distinctly apprehended and clearly explained ; and the connection of verse with verse and the sequence of thought are skilfully traced. The theology of the interpreter is like that of the apostle, broad and loving and reverent, yet firmly orthodox, loving enough to be stern. The reader finds his spiritual constitution braced ; his knowledge of the principles which govern the relation of man to God widened and sharpened ; his interest in Christianity quickened. In a word, the commentary is worthy of the text. All who appreciate the Epistle will appreciate Dr. Watson's volume, and will more than ever understand and relish the profoundest literary monument of apostolic times." [1]

[1] *The British Weekly*, May 21, 1896.

Later one friend and hearer wrote about the Lectures, "I think they do give some idea of a teaching that has been very wonderful and unique; so quiet, so deep and sure—embracing so much, and built upon principles of such essential truth as to make it seem to be the foundation upon which all that might ever arise of fresh and new could naturally stand."

"But what it was to listen to Dr. Watson's sermons about the midtime of his ministry, delivered almost extempore, with that quiet most natural manner of mingled sweetness and dignity, I could never say. I used to feel as if after him any one else had failed to get behind the words to the very spirit and inmost meaning of the text. He used but sparingly the expressions most common in the pulpit, but when he did, the words seemed to receive a new significance, or rather to recover again the reality of which conventional use had robbed them."

Permission has been gratefully received from Professor George Adam Smith to reprint his notice written at the time of Dr. Watson's death. It furnishes the few dates and particulars necessary, besides giving his own most discriminating and sympathetic appreciation:

"On the 14th of January Dr. Watson of Largs passed to his rest, having almost completed the eighty-sixth year of his life and the sixtieth of his ministry.

"The eldest son of Dr. Charles Watson, the cultured minister of Burntisland parish, he enjoyed, besides regular courses at Edinburgh Academy and University, the exceptional advantages of his father's influence, the tuition of the Rev. Marcus Dods of Belford, and a theological course under Dr. Chalmers, first at the University, and, after 1843, in New College, Edinburgh. He was a diligent and successful student, winning many distinctions. In 1847 he was licensed to preach, and assisted Dr. M'Farlan of Greenock. In 1848 he was ordained at Langholm, and ministered to the Free Church there for sixteen years, of which the most outstanding event was the revival of 1859. In 1864 he was called to the Free Church of Largs, and held the sole charge till 1901, when Mr. J. C. B. Geddes was inducted as his colleague. In 1886 he received the degree of Doctor of Divinity from Glasgow University. In 1887 he directed the reconstruction[1] of his church, originally a bare disruption building, and now one of the most beautiful sanctuaries in the West of Scotland. He published in 1891 his *First Epistle of St. John: Notes of Lectures to Serve as a Popular Commentary;* and on other occasions sermons, and, an admirable essay on *God and the Bible.* His jubilee was celebrated in 1897. He refused nomina-

[1] These additions and alterations are almost the only record of the rare talent of a young friend and architect, Archibald Grahame, who died before the work was well begun.

tion to the Moderatorship of the General Assembly. Dr. Watson's first wife, a niece of Dr. Chalmers, died during his Langholm ministry, leaving two sons, of whom the elder, Charles, is in business in Edinburgh, and the younger, Thomas, is now settled in W. Australia. In 1868, Dr. Watson married Mary Gray, second daughter of Walter Crum of Thornliebank, and is survived by her and their son, Walter Crum Watson, architect.

"In the space available it is not possible to do justice to a nature so large or to a ministry so long and, from first to last, so loftily sustained. Dr. Watson was endowed with a strong and clear intellect, exercised with a singular patience, sobriety, and candour. There have been among us very few so widely informed, and none who retained their information with more ease or used it with such proportion and simplicity. The freshness of his mind to the very end, his sanity and shrewdness, were proofs not only of the strong brain with which he was gifted, but of a rare force of character and self-discipline. A mind more naturally Christian, a judgment less warped, a wisdom more ripe and generous, it would be hard to conceive. Whether by the friends of his own age, among whom were some of the ablest men of our time, or by the younger men who have come under his influence, I know that this estimate of his powers and of his character would be sustained. One always felt that

the strength and dignity of his mind, his knowledge, and his wisdom would have worthily filled far higher positions than those with which he was so gratefully contented. Devoid of every ambition for himself save that of interpreting the mind of Christ as delivered to us by St. John, he was always most sympathetic with the different tasks and vocations of others. His knowledge of Church history and the older theology was profound and sympathetic; but he kept his mind open, sure of Christ's promise of His Spirit to the Church, and, in the light of Christ's teaching, quietly worked out new problems, and tested the most recent attempts to solve them for himself. He evinced a remarkable combination of knowledge, mental sympathy, and independence of judgment, which were all inspired by a catholic charity. From his work on the First Epistle of John, which more than one great authority has described as the best practical exposition of its subject, may be estimated the high level and fine quality of all his preaching. What are the virtues of this work, which render not only its substance so true and so lucid to the ordinary reader, but its methods so instructive to the preacher? One may confidently answer that they are these: the accurate scholarship that is behind all; the single aim it shows to express the Apostle's meaning; the patience by which this aim is pursued—a favourite expression of his was, 'Let us look at it step by step'; the simplicity with

which he follows various clues to the meaning; his clear definition of terms, and especially of those—as *the world* for instance—which are used in Scripture with various significations; his carefulness to distinguish between the Apostle's meaning and his own inferences from it; his quick moral instinct; his common-sense and unsparing criticism of current moral fallacies, of one of which he quietly says, 'This probably means that there is no real gulf between right and wrong'; his fresh and pertinent illustrations, which being always big and simple, abide in the mind of his reader; above all, his constant engagement with the mind and will of God, and his effort to express this to the people. The incidental confessions of the growth of his views upon various subjects are characteristic. From the beginning to the end his mind was always learning, and it was this which at once made him so inspiring an example to younger men, and kept his wisdom so true, so fresh, and so charitable."[1]

There was one happy association in Dr. Watson's life of later years which must be recorded here. It was that of the six young men who successively came to add so greatly to his comfort as his ministerial assistants.

The relations between him and his people were so much those of friends that they left the appointment of Dr. Watson's assistants in his own hands.

[1] The *United Free Church Missionary Record*, March, 1908.

He in turn relied upon Dr. Marcus Dods to send him a suitable man. Each was appointed without ever having preached. Dr. Watson was accustomed to say—"I have no faith in the evidence of single sermons." To one who was hesitating and doubtful whether he should not take another year either in Germany or at home, before beginning ministerial work, Dr. Dods said—"Go to Largs; it will be equal to another course to be with Dr. Watson."

Of him and of them Dr. Dods wrote when he was gone: "I never met any one whose mind was so congenial, who so understood difficulties, and had the wisest way of disposing of them. It was one of the great experiences of life to sit and hear him talk, however discursively, always with charity, width of soul, and width and profundity of perception. It has always been a great joy to me to see how the younger men fell under his spell—Carnegie Simpson, Douglas Miller, Atholl Gordon, Hugh Mackintosh, Allan Wilson, James Paterson, very unlike one another, but equally owning his supremacy, and counting it the great honour and experience of their lives to have known him."

One of his assistants, Dr. Mackintosh, to whom is due a very remarkable twofold tribute, preserved elsewhere, says of his preaching: "I search in vain for words to express all that Dr. Watson was to his people and to those who had the happiness to be his friends. . . . In the pulpit he talked a nobly clear

and simple language, and in later years his texts were almost invariably selected from the words of Jesus. . . . Fiery energy, like ambition, was foreign to his nature, and yet his sermons did thrill you by their sheer true insight into the mind of Christ, and the grand calm way in which he moved through the world of spiritual facts. Many of us who listened to Dr. Watson see truth still with eyes that he helped to open; and many a vision which he bade us see, and which is now our food and joy and inspiration, we will always thank him for, next to God."

Another of these young friends who came so near him wrote when he was gone: "I cannot think of Dr. Watson as anywhere but where the beloved disciple was at the Supper—beside the Saviour whom he so loved."

And another: "The world feels so much emptier for all of us now that he is away. For myself I am only feeling more than ever grateful that it was given me to come to Largs, and how his whole life was fitly represented by the outlook on Saturday when he was laid to rest—that prospect down the Firth, bathed in steady sunshine, to many of us a picture of himself, so broad and clear and full of light. And he helped us to see the same vision for ourselves, at least in part, through a glass darkly."

To the names of the assistants must be added that of the Rev. J. C. B. Geddes, who later so well

supported Dr. Watson as his colleague, and now stands in his place. Mr. Geddes' sermon of January 19th, 1908, printed at Largs with other memorials, most worthily commemorates this time. Other friends are gratefully remembered, sympathetic and helpful to Dr. Watson's ministry, such as his elders, Mr. Caldwell and Mr. Boyd.

There is little to relate of Dr. Watson's long and quiet life. It was uneventful, but made rich by the mind and spirit which filled it. Many friends write of what the home life was to them as guests at Northfield. "A walk round the beautiful garden with Dr. Watson was a liberal education, and is now an inspiring memory. How he loved all the flowers, and how they seemed to respond to the care bestowed upon them!"

All Dr. Watson's assistants speak of the talks in the study as the greatest experience in their lives, and one writes: "On the study table the interleaved Greek Testament showed that during the earlier ministry the work of textual revision and re-translation had been patiently and thoroughly done. Dr. Watson in the pulpit quietly, yet quite freely, instructed his hearers by giving fresh translations of any passages which demanded such treatment. There have been few ministers so trusted and beloved by simple and learned alike, and perhaps fewer still who have led so many of the common folk into the larger liberties of modern Christian thought."

The great personal trial to Dr. Watson in his later years—the gradual failure of his sight, as far as the power to read and write was concerned—was met by a very perfect patience. He did not greatly break down in health until the last year of his life; and the short attack of illness which, on 14th January, 1908, brought it to a close, found his strength shaken by the anxiety and sorrow to his family and himself through the illness and death of their beloved and life-long friend, Lord Kelvin, who passed away on the 17th December previous, while the unexpected news of the death of one of his own two remaining brothers, Sir Patrick Heron Watson, came to him a week later.

He did not live to bear the loss of his devoted companion of so many years. Mrs. Watson died on the 20th day of the following April.

THE FIRST EPISTLE GENERAL OF JOHN.

Chap. I. vv. 1, 2.

That which was from the beginning, that which we have heard, that which we have seen with our eyes, that which we beheld, and our hands handled, concerning the Word of life (and the life was manifested, and we have seen, and bear witness, and declare unto you the life, the eternal life, which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us).

It is clear that St. John wrote this Epistle to Christians of some standing in the faith, who either had his Gospel in their hands, or had learned from his own lips all that is in it. We can see that there is a close bond between him and them. He knows them well and feels strongly towards them. He wishes to guard them against spiritual danger, and to build them up in the faith and hope and love with which he himself is filled. This was the more needed, because there were among them some who had tried to shake their faith in Jesus, as the Christ, and the Son of God.

To meet these men he now stands forth, the last of the apostles, as a witness to facts, well-known to himself, and from the beginning taught by him and by his brethren, who had companied with him while the Lord Jesus went in and out among them.

His Gospel tells us what these facts are, and on them he lays great stress, because, unlike thoughts about truth, they cannot be shaped so as to fit in with what each man may wish to believe. A fact is unchangeable, and therefore of highest worth, as that on which alone faith can safely rest, or by which alone a life can be wisely guided. This is true of all the facts given us by St. John and the other evangelists. They belong to a time and to a land both far from us, so that we never could have found them out for ourselves. They are besides unlike any other facts known to us, and on them rests all of highest worth that many races of men have for ages felt, or hoped for, or done.

It is a question, beside which all others are small, whether, as St. John tells us, there came, in his day, out of the unseen, One who in a true sense was the Son of God, who became flesh, and dwelt among men, as Jesus of Nazareth, dying, and rising again from the dead, thus bringing to dead souls what is called life. St. John tells us that he is sure that these things did happen—that they are facts. In his Gospel he has set forth those of them which to his knowledge belong to the years which he spent

beside Jesus, and now in his Epistle he will add what, in the souls of others and in his own, he had seen to be the changes wrought by the life and death, and by the life after death, of the Word made flesh—still giving us facts. In his Gospel he sets us as far as he can at the side of himself and the other apostles, that with them we may behold Jesus, and hear what He said, and so be able to judge for ourselves whether, in His fulness of grace and truth, He had not a glory, "the glory as of the only begotten of the Father." In this Epistle he tells us what the effect was on himself, and on others whom he knew, of thus seeing and hearing Jesus. He became to them the "*Word of Life*."

We shall best follow the thought of St. John if we begin with the second verse of this chapter. It states in few words what his Gospel set forth at large. It tells us that this life, which was manifest to the apostles, and to which they bear witness as having seen it, was eternal, and had been with the Father. This is so very nearly that which St. John says in the first verse of his Gospel, that it seems likely that the term "*The Word*" is used in the same sense in both places.

It belongs rather to a commentary on the Gospel, than to this on the Epistle of St. John, to dwell on the history and meaning of this great name given to Him, who, when He became flesh, was known as Jesus. It is enough to say here that it

points towards what that Person is to the Father, just as we are taught what He is to us when He is called "The Life." As a word or speech brings out what is hidden in thought, so is God made known by Him who, being the Son of God, was as it were uttered by the Father when He was sent into the world to become flesh and to dwell among men. Not otherwise than by the use of such a figure of speech could a truth of this kind be set before us.

The term life is also figurative, as St. John uses it here. When in his Gospel he says that in the Word was life,[1] he taught the great truth that we are to see in the Word the source of life in all creatures, as well as in man. But in this place the term is used only to help us to think aright of what Christ is to the soul. We all know what the life of the body is, and what its death. A dead thing does not grow, it does not even last as it is, it falls to pieces, it no longer seems to be made for an end, it takes a lower and still lower form. This is true of the hardest rocks, but it strikes us most in things which once had life—in plants, in animals, but, above all, in the soul of man. When the soul is dead it does not come to an end, it sinks into corruption, but it does not, so far as we can see, cease to corrupt. It falls, but it goes on still to fall, nor does there seem to be any point beyond which it

[1] John I. 4; V. 26.

can sink no lower. The wisdom of man, and all that he can do, fails to hinder this. He can stop for the time the corruption, and make the fall slower, but he cannot lift the soul up, or bring back life to it. We know, for we ourselves have seen, how the sinful creature loses, as time goes on, spiritual sight, and self-rule, and feeling, and all that belongs to the image of God, and is helpless in this wretchedness.

Into a world thus dead in sin, the Word, St. John tells us, came as life, quickening the souls of men, checking corruption in them, causing growth, giving again to them rule over self. Not doing this all at once, but implanting Himself in each soul as the hope of a glorious renewal. It was this Word of life, which had ever from the beginning been the hidden source of all that was best in good men of old, who was now manifested to the apostles in such wise that they heard, and saw, and beheld, nay, handled Him, so that He could not be known better by any than by them.

We see that by the Word of life St. John means none other than Jesus Christ, who did not bring life to man as something apart from Himself. The life was and is Himself, and it was to Him as the life, and not to His teaching only or chiefly, that the apostles bear this witness—that with all His power to save from spiritual death, He had been in the world, beside them, nay, in them, overcoming

to their sure knowledge all death. They had seen this in His rising from the dead, and in the quickening by Him of their own souls. We in these days have not seen Jesus in the flesh, we have not touched and handled Him after His rising from the dead, but if He has raised our souls from their death in sin, we may be as sure as John was that Christ is risen indeed. We have felt the working of the power of Him who, though unseen, cannot, inasmuch as we are alive, be far from any one of us. To the life of Christ in himself every true Christian is a witness. We have not like St. John stood beside the source of the river of the water of life, but the stream from it has reached us. Hence the eagerness with which we listen to one before whose eyes it sprang, as out of the grave of Christ, and who saw that it gave life all the more clearly, that around it, to the edge of the world, spread only an unbroken waste of spiritual death.

Chap. I. vv. 3, 4.

That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you also, that ye also may have fellowship with us; yea, and our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ: and these things we write, that our joy may be fulfilled.

St. John will soon tell us why he speaks, but first he is again careful to say that he will bear witness

only to facts. He is to tell us, as in his Gospel he told us, only what he had seen and heard, and not what he thought and fancied. The worth of a fact is greater than that of an opinion even of the wisest. Hence the high place we give to these writings. They tell us what a truthful man beheld and heard. St. John does not say that the knowledge of these things reached him in a vision, or that he was inspired to report them. All that he had to tell of the Word of life came to him through his eye and ear and sense of touch, and had been stored in his memory.

Is there no place then here for Divine inspiration? There is indeed, if we understand these words aright, and give its rightful place to the life-giving power of Christ. Prejudice and Passion have, as we know, a strong sway over the senses which belong to a dead soul,—nay, which belong to living souls, in so far as there is not yet in them fulness of life. Hence a certain distrust with which it is not unlawful for us to listen to any story. What ground have we for being sure that St. John really saw and heard these things which he tells us he saw and heard? Now St. John needed no anointing of the Holy Spirit to enable him to use his eyes or his ears or his memory. Our senses do their work with the mechanical accuracy of a telescope or a phonograph, if our prejudices or our passions do not hinder them. But it is part of our

misery, as men fallen from our state of good, that they do hinder them. Therefore St. John, that he might be a trustworthy witness, needed that the life-giving power of Christ should, through the working of His Spirit, purge his soul of all bias, and, by implanting in it righteousness, make it fit to take in only what was really before it of the Word of life. It is on our hearts that the Holy Spirit works, and it was in his heart that St. John received the unction, which was enough to make him a witness who could not err, either in seeing Christ or in telling what he saw of Him. The Holy Spirit is in the same way needed by any Christian, if he is to bear true witness to himself, or to others, of what the Word of life has done, or is doing, in the little world of his own soul.

One of the last duties which Christ laid on His followers was that they should be witnesses to Him in all the earth. St. John does not speak of this as urging him to write. He is moved, he tells us, by the wish to bring us into the fellowship of the apostles, and also that his own joy and theirs may thus be fulfilled. The apostles have a knowledge of the greatest value. Through it they have come to stand in a new position towards the Father and His Son Jesus Christ. Their position St. John wishes us to share, that so we, and he with us, may be glad with fulness of joy. We may well

trust one who is thus moved by unselfish kindness towards us.

His wish then is to put us in the same place with himself whence he saw and heard Christ, that so we may see what he saw, and hear what he heard. This is to bring us into fellowship with him. If two of us know one thing we are thus far in fellowship, and this may be and often is the closest tie which can bind men together for good or evil. We see this if we think of two men knowing of a crime, or of the hiding place of a treasure. The bond too is strong just as the thing known is great. Here the tie which makes us one with the apostles is the knowledge that life has come into our dead world, and that this life may be ours. No knowledge can be of greater value to us than this. To share it, is the closest bond that can join us to each other, for all who have it are therefore among the living and not with the dead. "This is life eternal," saith Christ in His great prayer, "that they should know Thee the only true God and Jesus Christ whom Thou didst send."[1] To know then what St. John knew is to have life as he had it: it is to know God, in so far as we can know Him, as God knows Himself, to have no false thoughts of Him, and thus to have fellowship with Him, in clearly seeing that He is holy and just, but also that He is full of love and of boundless pity. This knowledge, if

[1] John XVII. 3.

it be once gained, brings with it a joy, which St. John tells us we share with all those who have that knowledge.

It must be kept in mind that this knowledge is not that which mere words can give us. The memory may be full of the best words about God, and yet the soul, with that memory in it, be quite dead. We really know those only who have a character not unlike our own. So that if the work of the Holy Spirit was needed to cleanse the souls of the apostles, so that seeing Christ they might tell us the truth about Him, not less must He in the same way deal with us if we are to understand their story. There can be no fellowship in spiritual knowledge, without fellowship in spiritual character. "Without holiness no man can see the Lord."[1] Within us grace and the knowledge of God keep equal pace. The more that likeness to God is renewed in us the better can we know Him.

To real knowledge then a very high place is given by this Apostle. As we come to know more and still more of Him who is the Word of life, we are raised from spiritual death, and grow in closeness of fellowship with God, and in fulness of joy. It is more often said that those blessings are reached through faith in Christ, but it is clear that no one can believe in Christ, or indeed in any one, without knowing Him, and there are some, of whom Christ

[1] Heb. XII. 14.

is the chief, whom we cannot know without believing in them. It is well to remember this, for there are those, who think they believe in Christ, whose faith rests rather on ignorance than on knowledge of Him. Thus was it with those who believed on Him when they saw the miracles which He did, but who walked no more with Him when they found out that He was more than a miracle worker.[1]

Chap. I. v. 5.

And this is the message which we have heard from Him, and announce unto you, that God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all.

St. John now tries to reach his aim by giving us in a single word the knowledge which he has of God. "*God,*" he says, "*is light.*" He sets forth this truth as a message which he had to give us from God Himself. We are not, however, to think that this was a spoken message which he was to say over to us. It is the best form he knows in which to give us as a fact, the sum of all the truth about God which, through seeing Christ, had become known to him, and which he had to make known to us. It is a figure of speech, which for this end he uses: for not otherwise can the truth about God be set forth through man, or to man. An idea of God which takes in all that is true of

[1] John II. 23, 24.

Him cannot be put into words. An apostle, even an angel, nay, Christ Himself, by word or by life, can only point out the line or path by which our thoughts may, without risk of wandering, travel towards God. They do not, nay, they cannot, lead any man to the point where he may stop and rest, as if beyond there was nothing of God to be searched out by him. It is because there is in God, as our everlasting portion, so much that is beyond our furthest search that we shall never weary of heaven. All that can be done here or even there to make Him known to us, is to call up certain familiar ideas, to awaken in us some often felt emotions, and to tell us that these have to do with God also. He teaches us to do this when He sets Himself forth as a Father, a word which suggests, but by no means defines, His diverse relations to Christ, to His people, and to His creatures. So it is here. The word light calls up certain ideas, awakens certain feelings, which are the same as those which we are allowed to connect with God, that we thus may have such knowledge of what He is as can be ours. A great message therefore is this, brought to us by St. John, if we can understand it aright, for it gathers together, and gives us at once, many truths about God, which otherwise we could not have so readily grasped.

We all feel, and some have always felt, that light bears a certain likeness to God; but the striking

fact is that not only the things true of light, which must have been known from the first, but those also which latest science has shown us, have in the spiritual world their counterpart in God. How different is light from everything else. How much about it is hidden even from those who have most deeply searched into its nature. From how far, and with what swiftness, does it shine; yet how near and all-piercing it is. Above all, how pure, and of what surpassing beauty; how bountiful it is, and in its bounty how fair to all, giving life, growth, safety, joy. How truly in its clearness does it show us what really is, whether near us or far away, and how needful it is for all work. It is known only to those who, having their eyes open, are able to take it in. It reaches us, moreover, by rays outshining from the glory of its source. And passing over many other truths about it, to take up one which we see was before the mind of the Apostle, it, beyond all other means of knowing, makes communion or fellowship possible among men, who, in the clearness of light, agree as to what really is before them and around them. Another likeness, which could not be known to St. John, it would not be right to pass. For it is strange that three colours, each of them being light, go to make up the perfection of light. No doubt he thought of only a few of these points of likeness; perhaps only of the clearness of light, and of its bounty, as

answering to the holiness, and to the love of God, with all that flows to us from these, and among them fellowship or sameness in knowledge. Nor can we doubt, since he afterwards says, "*God is love,*" that he had already in his mind the striking kinship between light and love in much that is true of them both.

St. John does not think it enough to say that God is light. He has a reason for this. For when he wrote, there were in the Christian church those who had the not unlikely thought that in the universe there were two highest spiritual powers, set against each other, and of equal might. The one of these, Good, the other, Evil. The one answered to all we know of light, the other to what we feel about darkness, and what belongs to it of blindness, loneliness, doubt, mistake, danger, fear and death. The history of the world and of man, it was said, was simply a history of the struggle between these powers. It was seemingly to meet this error that St. John adds that "*in God there is no darkness at all*"; that in the Almighty, who ruleth all, there is nothing in the least like darkness. Evil, in short, is not a God.

How comes it then that evil seems to reign beside God; that in His universe there is a darkness in which beings walk who were made by God? How can this be in a region filled by Him who is light? Now St. John, like all others who have aught of

heavenly wisdom, enters not on the question, Whence came, how began, this darkness? He certainly does not think it easily answered, for he meets it, as we shall see, in another way than by trying to tell us whence it came. For the present he grapples with the far more useful question, How can men, since there is this darkness in which they walk, have that fellowship with God, to bring them into which was the aim of his writing?

It is clear that what darkness suggests to St. John is sin or hatred, as set over against the purity, the bounty, or the love, which belong to God and to light. Indeed, in Chap. IV. v. 8, he uses the word "love" in the place which he now gives to "light," saying "God is love"; so that as he goes on he makes more simple the ideas he joins with light, until the word comes to mean love in its highest form of pure unselfishness. On the other side darkness comes to stand for hatred, in all its many shapes, which range from the simple putting of self above others, down to a malice which does not stop short of the sin of Cain. When we reach the seventh and following verses of Chap. II. we find that this was already in his mind, the two ideas of light and love changing places as it were before him, until at last, from his point of view, they seem no longer twain, but one and the same. It is by keeping in mind that light and love, that darkness and hatred, are much the same in the thought of

the Apostle, that we are able more easily to follow him in what he will go on to say.

Chap. I. v. 6.

If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in the darkness, we lie, and do not the truth.

The question then before the Apostle is, How can men walking in darkness, that is, leading a selfish life, have fellowship with God? and his answer is that they can have no fellowship. Looking at the way in which St. John sets this forth, we can see that there must have been in the church, when he wrote this Epistle, some who thought they might continue in sin that grace might abound, who made much of the gladness Christ bestows, while they set at nought the duties to which He binds us. There was, we also gather, more than one way in which these people set forth their error; some of them, leading a selfish life, held that they nevertheless were in fellowship with God, seeing things as He saw them, and feeling about them as He felt. Of them the Apostle says that "they lied and did not the truth." And he further hints that, unlike those who are in the light, they have no fellowship with each other. There were some again (v. 8) who held that to the Christian there is no such thing as sin, meaning that if they did what was called

a sin, they were not answerable for it. Of them the Apostle says that "they deceive themselves, and that the truth is not in them." And lastly (v. 10), there are still others who say that while there is such a thing as sin, they themselves had never sinned. Of them the Apostle says that "they make God a liar and that His word is not in them."

Such are the judgments passed on these people by God, by St. John, and by all who, being in the light, see in the lives of these men, and of all men, what God sees in them,—sinfulness, guilt, and acts of sinning. But those who are in the light do not therefore lose hope, for in that light is also seen the pity of God, as shown in the gift of His Son sent to die for us. They see how real sin is, and the guilt of it presses on them, for they know that they themselves have sinned. Therefore needful for them is the sacrifice of Christ, and full of hope for them is the fact of it. He really died, and His blood cleanseth from all sin. God is thus faithful and just to forgive them their sins. All who are in the light see this more or less clearly, and thus have fellowship with God and with one another. They see and feel alike about themselves and sin. Such is St. John's main line of argument.

Let us look at it step by step. Now as to the man who walking in darkness yet says that he is in fellowship with God, the fact is that the God he speaks of cannot be the true God. We must ever

keep in mind that while there is not a man in the world who has not a God of some kind, it may truly be said, even if we take in those whose God is in the main the true God, that there are no two men in the world who have quite the same God. The word "God," taken by itself as used by a man, really tells us nothing of what he means by it. We see this in our own case, when we remember the changes that have taken place, not in the creed which has been always ours, but on the real meanings we have put on the words of it, and above all in our views of the character of God, ever since we came to know that there is a God. We hope that we have since then grown in the knowledge of God, and we are ashamed of what we once thought of Him. In some things, by no means trifling, He is clearly not quite the same God whom we once tried to serve. We see this also in the unmistakable differences in their notions of God to be found among those who belong to our own church or sect, and still more perhaps in those who are of other churches. These differences become more and more marked when we look at the Christianity of other ages and lands. The name given to God is the same, the words used about Him are much the same, yet we cannot help seeing how unlike are many of the thoughts which men have had, and have, of Him, and how diverse their feelings towards him. How notable, for example, is it

that in the Shorter Catechism of the Westminster Assembly the word love is not to be found, and that the free offer of the Gospel is but once spoken of, and that only in three or four words. From all this it is clear that the thoughts which each man has of God depend not on the name he gives Him, or much on the words by which he finds Him described, but rather on his own notion of what is supreme—of what is best or highest, most desirable and glorious. Who or what is it, on whom, or on which, a man trusts most for what he wishes most: and to which, or to whom, he is ready to give up most? What is that, in short, whatever it may be, of which he says, "Whom have I in heaven but Thee, and in all the earth there is nothing I desire beside Thee; my flesh and my heart faileth, but Thou art the strength of my heart and my portion"? That is his God. No doubt the feelings which prompt such words are due only to the true God, to Him who is the Most High and the Best; but they are given, as we know, to any person or thing, however unworthy and base, which any man has truly worshipped, for without them no worship is real.

It is undoubtedly the business of those who believe that they are honestly worshipping God to make sure that their notion of God is the highest. There can be no clearer duty than this. To go on without settling this point is to live in sin.

From what then seems to us the highest notion of God, we see that there is among many of those whom we know, or of whom we hear or read, a falling down to a lower and still lower idea of God, until a point is reached when we feel that the thoughts which some have of Him are so low as not to be of our God at all: that these notions of the highest and the best rise not above the earth, and often not to what is best in it, or even good. Such are they who with trust and many sacrifices worship themselves, or society, or money, or power, or pleasure, or a shadow, or a fancy: shunning sins against these their gods, or repenting of them, with a full purpose of heart. This we know to be true,—some of us from the part we have taken in idol worship. As Aaron called the golden calf Jehovah, so may any name be given by a man to his God. Thus it is that when the chances of birth or neighbourhood set an idol-worshipper among Christians, he often tries to believe that he knows their God, and that he is walking with Him, and with them, in the light.

It is not easy, by the use of words about God, to prove to such an one that he is mistaken. Nor does St. John try to do so. He gives him a simple test by which the question of who or which is his God may be settled at once. What kind of life does the man lead? Is he a selfish man? If so, he is walking in darkness; for with the Apostle

darkness and selfishness are one. Then can he have no fellowship with the true God. He is not in the light, he is not seeing things as God sees them. Therefore, St. John adds, if he boasts of that fellowship, he lies; he says what his own conscience, if he listened to it, would tell him to be false. He would fain believe that what he really knows to be sin is not sin, and that the sparks of his own kindling are giving him the light of God. Whence it comes that his whole life is a falsehood; he does not, he is not doing, the truth.

The word "truth" here means, as it often does, the real, or that which anything is, in contrast to that which it seems to be, but which it is not, as when a stone is mistaken for bread, or a serpent for a fish. Such a mistake is made by all who lead selfish lives, not spent in the light of God, or in fellowship with Him.

Let none of us put aside this lesson as if we did not need it. St John, in teaching it, puts himself beside his scholars, saying not "*you*" but "*we*," thus showing that he knows that there is no man who does not need ever to guard against making darkness out to be light, denying in his heart the reality of sin, losing sight of the guilt of sin, or trying to believe that he has not sinned.

Thus we see how vainly does one speak of his fellowship with God, if he is walking in darkness, or, in other words, leading a selfish life. Those

only who walk in the light have fellowship with God, and, the Apostle adds, with each other also. Men walking together in a dark night cannot see the same things, or have the same thoughts about what is around them, for they see nothing. If there be a little light, some fellowship there may be, but only a little, for what each sees, or thinks he sees, has its shape given to it by his wishes, his hopes, or his fears, and these are of so many kinds that the thought of each, as to his surroundings, so differs from that of his neighbours, as that there can be little fellowship among them. So is it with all who live, as most do, in a moral twilight. But if there be clear light, then there must also be fellowship, since in that case wishes or fears can do little to shape our impressions. People who are in the dark may indeed be *told* what is around them, but this gives them at the best a vague knowledge, which carries with it little or no sense of reality. If we are to know a truth, we must see it for ourselves in the light, since in that case the knowledge gained is clear, and the same to all who see.

It is this set of ideas, taken from the outer world, which St. John thus uses to suggest spiritual truth about God, and what we are to Him, and to each other. And indeed he thus helps us in many ways. For example: We know that a man born blind is not answerable for not being able to see. This must be true of spiritual blindness also. No man

could be blamed because he did not see God if there had never been given him any faculty for seeing Him. St. John therefore tells us in his Gospel that light was at first joined to life in man.[1] St. Paul also makes this fact the ground on which he builds up much of his Epistle to the Romans. "That," he says, "which may be known of God was manifested by Him to man, for the invisible things of Him are clearly seen, being perceived through the things that are made, even His eternal power and divinity."[2] It is this, he urges, that takes all excuse from man, when thus knowing God he glorifies Him not as God and is thankless, and our Lord tells Nicodemus that the ground of any man's condemnation is that "light has come into the world, but that men love darkness rather than light," and "will not come to the light." Men have thus the organ as it were of spiritual vision, but they dislike to use it, and therefore dwell of their own choice in the darkness. But as in the outer, so in the inner world; to abide in the darkness weakens, and at last destroys the organ of sight, so that the man who began by loving darkness becomes at last unable to see. The same most hurtful loss is set forth in Scripture under the figure of the heart becoming hard. Man comes into the world able to see the beauty of the unselfishness or love which his conscience praises, and therefore of

[1] John I. 4. [2] Rom. I. 20.

truly knowing God. It is when, through living for self, he can no longer love, that he becomes unable to see God.

Chap. I. v. 7.

But if we walk in the light, as He is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanseth us from all sin.

We have already seen that one of the ideas, called up to us by light, is the ready and clear seeing of things as they really are, instead of the doubtful and strange fancies about our surroundings, which are bred in darkness. This is best seen when, as here, we think of *walking,* that is, of taking step after step in life. If on our way we are in the light as God is in the light, we see around us the same things which God sees there, and we have feelings and judgments about them which are like His. What is, or is not, what is true, or false, what is good, or bad, what is great, or trifling to Him, is so to us also. For while appearances, or aspects, or fancies may be many, a reality, a truth, a fact is one, and can only be one, to God and also to us. That which *is* can be nothing else than what it is, to God as well as to us, though in it He doubtless sees more than we do. That which is *here,* cannot be to Him or to us not here; what is true cannot be false, the good cannot be bad, or seem bad, to

any being, whether God or man, who is in the light. Thus all who are in the light see things as God sees them, and thus have fellowship with Him. Or, to speak more really, since we are none of us in perfect light, each of us, with what light he has, sees God not otherwise than as God sees Himself, thus really seeing God, though not all of God, nor any of us quite the same thing in God, and, up to our light, having feelings and judgments like to those of God about the world and time.

But also, and it is clearly this which St. John has before his mind, we see ourselves also as God sees us; and what the light makes clear to us as it does to Him, is our sin. For as the light of this world brings out spots and blemishes and flaws which the darkness hides, so in the light in which God is, and we also, we see ourselves to be sinners, guilty and defiled. This is indeed one of the greatest of all the disclosures made to us by the light, and this, as we see from verses 8 and 10, is filling the Apostle's thoughts. But in this light we also see God as He really is. He Himself is light and love, kind, merciful, ready to forgive. Being ourselves in the light, that is, partaking of God's love, we see that thus to love is good, good in us, certainly good in God. It is right, it is a duty, it belongs to righteousness, to forgive. This the light makes clear, so that if we do not see that God wishes to forgive us, it is because we have not light

enough rightly to see Him. This may mean that we ourselves, being unforgiving, cannot think of God as wishing to forgive.

But there is another cause for thinking thus. If we have light enough to see God at all, it certainly reveals to us the majesty of His justice and truth. We see, being in the light, that it is our part to forgive wrongs done to ourselves, but also that there are evil deeds wrought in the world which justice to another binds us by any means to hinder, and we see that it must be so with God also. Besides God, speaking the truth to man, had told him of the linking together of sin and misery, of sin and death, by a bond which belongs not to an arbitrary will, but to the eternal and unchangeable order of the universe, and is one part of that everlasting righteousness which lays duty on God, as well as through Him on His creatures. It belongs, we see then, to the nature of God to wish to forgive the unhappy sinner, but it is also His nature to see that sin does not fail to receive its just reward.

Such thoughts as these led St. John to use the words at the end of verse 7, "*The blood of Jesus His Son cleanseth us from all sin.*" He sees with St. Paul that to all who are in the light the cross of Christ is the very power of God and the wisdom of God;[1] giving Him a power which, without it, even He had not, to pardon sin, and which sets at

[1] 1 Cor. I. 24.

one, with a noble wisdom, His justice and truth with His love of mercy, and His hatred of sin with His grace towards the sinner. They who are in the light have fellowship one with another in seeing the great outlines of this truth; but with the best of them the light has not yet so fallen upon it as to make all the details of it quite clear. It is like a great mountain behind which the sun is rising with a dazzling brightness. The darkness is past, but the light must shine more and more towards the perfect day, before those who rejoice most in the realities it unveils can quite agree as to all that goes to make them up.

There can be no doubt that a simple belief in the fact that the blood of Christ cleanseth from all sin is enough to bring us into fellowship with the apostles, and to fulfil our joy as Christians. It clearly concerns us more nearly to know that God is able to forgive and cleanse us, than to see how He came to be thus able. A man whose debts have been paid by a friend does not need to be told, before he can accept his freedom, by what means his friend became rich enough to help him, though he will thank his friend with a far warmer feeling if he learns at how great a sacrifice his help was given. So it is with God's great gift to us. Those who are bold enough to think that they thoroughly understand all that is true of the atonement are few indeed beside the many who have been saved from

fear and from sin, by simply believing that Christ died for them.

Hence it is, no doubt, that St. John, whose wish it is to give us plain facts rather than their causes, does not take up any of the questions so often and so eagerly asked, as to whence comes the power of the blood of Christ. At the same time we cannot doubt that he, full like St. Paul of Old Testament truth, believed that the blood of a sacrifice atones by reason of the life that is not only in it (Levit. xvii. 11, Rev. version), but which, abiding in it after it had been shed by the offerer, as betokening his sense of what his sins had merited, was then, by his will and choice, offered by the priest to God, to whom it thereafter belonged as His. The truths, thus shadowed forth by animal sacrifices, were doubtless seen by St. John to be realities in the death of Christ, who, being Himself sinless, offered Himself with thought and choice for us, who by faith and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit are in a true sense one with Him, as the body is with the head, and thus suffer with Him. But further, the life thus offered in the blood shed for us, was, along with the lives of all who were thus with Him in His death, brought by Him as it were before God, and given over to God as now His, to be guarded by Him from death, and for evermore used by Him in His service.

We may believe that such were the ideas before

the mind of St. John when he thought of the blood of Jesus Christ. It is the symbol not only of the suffering of death borne by Him for us, but also of dedication made by Him of us. One cannot read in St. John's Gospel such words of Christ as those in which He tells us that it is as life-upholding bread that He gives His flesh for the life of the world, without seeing that the Apostle thought that we not only suffered in Christ what our sins merited, but also that in Him we live to God, a fact which, unlike that of our pardon, we can at once see to be real, by using the tests which St. John will soon give us.

There is that, as we have seen, in the sacrifice of Christ for our sins, about which, when they go beyond the mere fact of it, all good men are not at one. Yet things are often done among ourselves which throw light on it, as when a man, who has made himself a place in the world, prosperous, much thought of, yet, out of pity for his father's household, fallen into want and wretchedness and shame, leaves behind him his happy life, to go to his lost brothers, takes on him their debts, shares even their shame, suffers with them, works for them, and thus lifts them up, covers their disgrace with his worth, sets them to honest toil, brings back comfort to their home—in short, redeems and saves them by the sacrifice of himself.

There are many ways in which the good done

by sacrifice shows itself in the world; and so the Scriptures give many different views of all that came of the great sacrifice of Christ. Here, when St. John speaks of the soul being cleansed from all sin by it, he is clearly thinking, not of our being forgiven, but of our being saved from the sinful nature, the false heart, from the selfishness, the darkness, in which we have mistaken all around us, so as to have chosen the evil, and cast from us the good. No doubt he knew that, before this could be done, pardon was needed. For it is a true and far-seeing view of sin (and he could not fail to take it) which makes it the punishment of the sinner, that in the sin he has freely chosen he shall abide, and become its slave. This doom Christ lifts from us, and is then able justly to break our bonds as He broke the bonds of death, and to lift us into the freedom with which He makes His people free. He thus saves us from darkness, and that not by a hidden work which we cannot follow, but rather by His Spirit, who takes of the things of Christ Himself and shows them to us, until we see the glory of His sacrifice on the cross, as greater and far more noble than all other glories. In the new light, which makes this clear to us, the soul also sees how grievous were the mistakes into which it fell in the darkness, when it grasped selfish joy as its highest good; and how a far better prize is gained when, forgetting self, it reaches charity, and

thus comes near to what is clearly God's idea of the best and highest in the glory even of His own Son.

It is enough sometimes to rouse our cold hearts from their selfishness, to show them the noble things which have been done by men like ourselves. Through the darkness of such souls, the light of some great sacrifice, of some heroic obedience, even of some life-long patience, forces its way as with a sudden flash, and for a moment even those who most love the darkness are startled into wonder by the brightness of it. But such lights are pale beside the glory of God when He sent His Son to die for us, and of that Son when He willingly gave His life that we might live.

Chap. I. vv. 8-10.

If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us.

St. John has in the sixth verse told us that those who walk in darkness cannot see things as God sees them, or as they see them who are in the light; such men, therefore, can have no fellowship with God, or with them. He now, after showing us the

better state of those who are in the light, takes up the further evils that come of walking in darkness. One of these is to think and to say that, to those who are in fellowship with God, there is no sin. This probably means that there is no real gulf fixed between right and wrong, between the good and the bad; that these are kept apart only by the arbitrary will of God, who therefore can and will make no distinction between them when dealing with those whom He chooses to favour, who therefore have no sin.

There are others who do not go so far, who allow that there is a distinction between right and wrong, yet hold that they themselves have never sinned (v. 10). It would be a vain task to gather the arguments, often very subtle, whereby men, wishing to feel safe, as if in fellowship with God, have tried to do away with the claims of duty; or granting these, to make themselves believe that they have fulfilled them, thus seeking to join hope of heaven with freedom to sin on earth. The Apostle will not dispute with such men. They are denying their deeper knowledge of fact; they have in them no truth, no honest dealing with themselves. High above all such falsehoods are the unchanging judgments of reason and conscience, drawing a clear marked line between the good and the bad, the true and the false.

That there is, and ever must be this line, is to

us a deep-seated certainty, not believed, but seen or known, as axioms are. We are sure of it; all reasoning rests on it, therefore no reasoning can shake it. Pride, self-love, passion, may hate these convictions, and strive against them; they may beat them down, and stop their mouths, but sooner or later they rise again in their inborn strength, and force on men the truth that sin is sin, and that sin and misery are, by a bond that no man can cut, chained together. They make it certain to the man who has said that he has no sin, that he is deceiving himself, and that the truth is not in him.

As for those who say that they have not sinned, St. John deals with them in another way. He says that they make God a liar. A man may take many different paths in coming to think that he has not sinned. He may make the word "sin" to mean crime or vice, or at least some outward act, which breaks some known law of God. He sees no sin in wishes, or feelings, or cherished longings, and none in failing to make the best use of his time, or means, or powers—a wide field for the growth of sin, in which those who are in the light find more of sin than in any other. For there are many who can with some truth say that they have never been vicious, or are aware of any self-willed breach of the law of God; yet if any one of them was to add that therefore he had not sinned, he makes God a liar. He has not been believing God, yet God has

been speaking the truth to him in many ways. Sometimes by sending some sorrow which, pointing straight to a sin in the past, tells him not to call it a mistake. In this, conscience has gone along with God, not to be silenced by reasonings, and giving a strange pain at the heart, which is not the same as that of sorrow. Most clearly also does God speak by His word, often in it throwing light on the less clear judgments of His providence, and giving force to the sentences of conscience.

To see why St. John thinks that heedlessness to all this is to give the lie to God, it must be kept in mind that by all these means God gives to us the knowledge, not only of His will, but of the truth—that is to say, of what is and must be. A short life is enough to tell us that fire burns, that a fall hurts, that some plants are poisonous, and some sicknesses infectious; and we ourselves often, with children, put such facts into the form of laws, enforced by a threat. When experience begins to be less trustworthy, because of the length of time that must pass before we can see what comes of some things we do, then conscience raises her warnings; and again, when experience utterly fails, and conscience herself gives a stammering judgment, God by His word tells us to what our acts must lead. Experience and conscience together can make certain to us the evil of falsehood, or theft, or impurity; but God alone has knowledge

enough to warn us against those more subtle forms of selfishness, the evil results of which can scarcely show themselves to us while we are in this world. For indeed we fail to see what the laws of God really are, if we think of them as nothing else than the arbitrary claims of One who, having power over us, wishes to show it by hedging in our way.

These laws do indeed carry with them the highest authority, but it is well for us also to look on them as warnings which God in His love gives to our ignorance. They are testimonies, as the Psalmist often calls them,[1] to facts, known to God but unknown to us, which yet it is death to us not to know. The first law which God gave to man is in the form of a testimony. It simply states a fact. "In the day that thou eatest of that tree thou shalt surely die." By a necessity as hidden from Adam as the poison lurking in some foreign berry is to us, death to the soul must follow if the fruit of that tree be eaten. God does not say, "I will kill you"; he says, "Thou must die." Thus is it that St. John sees that our breaches of God's law, and those of them, above all, against which experience fails to warn us, are each of them unthankful denials of the truth of God. By them we make God a liar; His word is not in us.

There is another way by which men try to believe that they have not sinned. There may be sin, they

[1] As in Psalm CXIX.

say, but it is not we who have sinned; at any rate the blame of sin is not ours; we did not make ourselves; God made us, and we with our sins are His work. Now here there is indeed a great difficulty, of which if we cannot untie the knot we can cut it. We can fall back on the fact that we feel and know that our sins are our own acts, and that we could in each act of sin have helped sinning had we so chosen. If there be a fact in the universe this is a fact; we are as sure of it as we are of our own being; and if God made us with that conviction He would be treating us falsely were it not a fact.

But if St. John thought of this, as part of his answer to the man who held that he had no sin, he does not say so. His mind is full of God, and of the death of His Son for us. God has come down to us from the height of the unknowable. He stands before us, visible and intelligible. In Him we see nothing more clearly than that He is the great enemy of sin, and at the same time full of unbounded pity for sinners. How could He then be the author of sin in us, when to take it from us He spared not His own Son, but gave Him up to death, for this end, that if a man will only cease from deceiving himself about sin—only see that he is a sinner and confess it, he will find that God is "faithful and just to forgive him his sin, and to cleanse him from all unrighteousness." It cannot

be that God made men sinners when the only way of forgiving and cleansing them—(and it must have been the only way, else most certainly God would have taken some other)—was by determinate counsel to give up His Son to death. All who believe in Christ can thus see that through Him we are saved from the hell of thinking God to be the author of sin, as indeed we are through Christ saved from so many other hells.

Chap. II. vv. 1, 2.

My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye may not sin. And if any man sin, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous: and He is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for the whole world.

The two first verses of this chapter ought to be joined to the end of the first chapter. They clearly belong to it, and suitably end it, while with the third verse a new subject is begun. The Apostle has just used words most cheering to those who have sinned; might not these weaken the force of the other words, sharp and stern against sin, which stand beside them? We know from the history of the church, perhaps we have seen for ourselves, that the risk of doing some harm always goes along with every plan for doing good. The Prince of

Peace Himself could not but bring into the world a sword,[1] and He who came to save His people from their sins has, by the largeness of His love, tempted some to think that they may continue in sin, that grace might abound. There is indeed no good gift of God which may not be turned to evil use, no truth which may not be twisted into a falsehood. It is a strange cunning, as of the devil, that would make much of the grace of God, by putting on it the strain of more and still more sins to be pardoned. But our own fallen nature is equal to the task of making out, apart from any help, that the truth of God can live along with sin.

The Apostle then, as an old man and well-taught Christian, who knows the dangers that lie on both sides of the heavenly path, would with loving words warn, against light views of sin, his children in Christ, many of them still weak, and foolish, and readily led astray. It is not enough to ask through Christ forgiveness for past sins. Sin must not only be confessed, it must be forsaken. All fresh sin must be watchfully shunned. "These things," he says—these cheering truths—"I write that ye sin not at all": not only that you may escape from the habit of sin, but that you may so guard your lives as that no single act of sin may be found in them. All that St. John has now said, all that as an apostle he has ever said, is to keep us from sin.

[1] Matt. X. 34.

His aim has not been so much to give us peace of mind and freedom from fear, as to make us good. That is in the first place, happiness only in the second place. For pain and sorrow are evils far less to be dreaded than sin. No man can ever fail in his duty to God or his neighbour without suffering for it, for he was made to live for God and for others. If he has not in his heart love like the love of God, his life must be unhappy. It is from this that St. John would draw us, by leading us to that God who so readily pardons every repentant sinner, and who, having pardoned, takes away his sin, till none of it is left.

To that pure sinlessness, and that unbroken joy, to which a clear view of God and of His Son would bring us, we do not reach here. For the love of self, the darkness which dims, if it does not quench the light, ceases not to hinder such a clear view. The Apostle knows that all Christians do fall into sin, yet he does not say "if *we* sin," but "if *any man* sin," for He would wish us ever to feel that the ideal of the Christian life is sinlessness. But if any come short of this, as indeed we all do, we are not therefore to be hopeless, for "*we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.*"

Sin wrought by a Christian is indeed heinous, for in him it means not a mere slighting of God's rights as a King; it does despite to the kindness

of a Father, it denies the debt we owe to the cross, it is sin against light and love. But that wonderful Friend who died for us does not therefore cast us off. He becomes our Advocate, being moved thereto not more by our misery here, than by the knowledge of the final issue of it in a state of evil more awful than any known to man on earth. He therefore offers Himself as our helper, to be sought and called in by us, but then all powerful for us.

We are not told how Jesus Christ acts as our Advocate, nor indeed can we know this. It is clear however that it is with knowledge of each of us, and with pity for each, that He carries on for us a work in heaven as real and as needful as that which He wrought on earth. For our escape from sin He must be Advocate with the Father for us, even as the Holy Spirit must be Advocate with us for the Father. In this we may be sure that He does nothing that could take from the majesty of the law of God; for, as the Apostle here reminds us, Christ is Himself the righteous. But we are also sure that He has not to soften in the mind of God any hardness towards us, for God is the Father, and St. John is glad thus now to name Him. But He is the Judge, just and true, and therefore our Advocate, while He has to bend no unwillingness towards us on the part of God, and therefore uses no entreaty, has to meet His justice and His truth. This He does by simply standing, as it were, before the

Father as the propitiation for our sins. He Himself being the propitiation, not the propitiator, and therefore using on our behalf no plea outside of Himself. He is the righteous, and thus His propitiation, not being for Himself, is enough for the forgiveness of our sins by the Judge.

Such is the view of Him taken by the Apostle from the side of God. From our side we see in Him one "touched by the feeling of our infirmities; in all things tempted like as we are,"[1] so that we can, through Him, come boldly to the throne of grace, day after day, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help us in each new time of need.

In the second verse the Apostle tells us a very striking fact, when he goes on to say that Jesus Christ "*is the propitiation not for our sins only but also for the whole world.*" This may mean not for Jews only, but for Gentiles too. But when we think of the aim of the Epistle, and that the persons to whom it was written do not seem to have been Jews only, we feel that St. John wished to teach us, that as sin is broad as is the world, so is the propitiation. And indeed not vainly is this truth brought in here. For if a Christian falls into a sin, and deeply feels the guilt of it, nothing short of this truth could restore his soul. His very fall would fill him with doubt of his having any place in that propitiation, had it been said to be only for

[1] Heb. IV. 15.

Christians. Such a name he would feel his sin forbade him to take. But these words rescue him from despair. I dare not, he may say, poor creature that I am, call myself of the body of Christ, but certainly I am of the world, and Christ is the propitiation for the whole world.

Some may think that all this that the Apostle is urging is of little real value, but there are ten thousand witnesses to tell us that the man, who in the light sees God and his own sins, cannot otherwise than by believing these truths escape the threats of conscience, when he is brought face to face with judgment and eternity.

Chap. II. vv. 3, 4.

And hereby know we that we know Him, if we keep His commandments. He that saith, I know Him, and keepeth not His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him.

In the two first verses of this chapter there is set forth the cure given us by God for sin. In the next four verses we are told of the signs whereby we may know that we have taken to ourselves, and used that cure. We have done so, if we have got from it the good it was meant to do us. If it has given us spiritual health, we shall find that we know God, and also that we are brought so near Him as

to be in Him, and to abide in Him. But how are we to be sure that we are knowing God? That which we now think to be God, is that really God? Without being sure of this, we cannot rest and be still. Now it is often said that to reach any sense of safety, of peace, or of joy in believing, we must look straight to God, and away from any thing we can find in our own doings. This is indeed true, only we must see that the God we look to is the true God, and not a false God.

There can be no doubt that a sense of safety and peace can be reached, at least for a time, by looking to and trusting in a false God. A sense of safety, and the peace this brings, is the prize held out by all religions; and faith in any one of these gains more or less of it. But such sense of safety is, so far as we know, as false as the God it rests on. Clearly then we must, if we are feeling ourselves safe, ask, before giving full course to our rejoicing, whether it is on the true God that our faith is resting. Nor let any man say that because he belongs to a church that hates idolatry, and has the Bible to guide it, he can have nothing to do with a false God. It cannot be too strongly urged on such a man that a false God does not need to be made of wood or stone. We frame false Gods of ideas and set them up in the temple of our heart, in which alone real worship can be offered to any God, whether true or false. This God set up in our

hearts, and worshipped with our thoughts and feelings, may have any name, and may be set forth in the best words. But this is of small use if the words are fastened to wrong ideas or to no ideas.

The words of a man's creed tell little of the real object of his worship, when, as is more or less the case with all men, he, in fashioning his God, makes no real use of all the ideas that are wrapped up in the words, but only of those that suit him; often, too, adding others foreign to what he calls his belief. For indeed in this work he is chiefly moved by prejudice, which leads him to keep hold of any ideas of God which he may have chanced at one time to gather; by passion, which makes him dislike anything in God which may tend to thwart his own will; and by sloth, which keeps him back from all seeking after truth which might end in unsettling the easiness of his life, by forcing him to think for himself, and perhaps to work or to fight. The end of all this is that the God he really worships is altogether such an one as he the fallen creature is himself. This is his God, but not the true God.

How then are we to know God? We, who, if we do not dislike to think or to fight, are still so moved by prejudice and passion? Now it is certain that we seldom really know our nearest neighbour. We are for ever finding out that we have not fathomed all the depths, good or bad, of his character, shallow as it seems. Indeed, it may be asked

if any one in this world quite understands any one else. It is curious how seldom we all put the same value on a common friend. Surely this can arise only from our all being in part unlike each other; so that we come to see that we can enter into no point of character in another which has not its counterpart in our own. When this is wanting, we misunderstand each other, we mistake each other's motives; for we cannot help looking at another from our own standpoint—that is, from the narrow outlook of our own point of view. And if it be so with our knowledge of men, who are on the whole like ourselves, how must it be with the notions we form of God? We see Him through ourselves, we make our limitations and our imperfections His, and then we say that we know God, when we know only our sinful selves enlarged.

No doubt, could we go back to Eden and stand, like Adam in his freshness, pure and sinless, as made in the image of God, we should then fall into no error did we think of God as an enlarged image of ourselves. All that is in us would then call up, and set before us, not all that is God, but nothing that is not God. All that we saw would be true God, or as much, if one may so speak, as a finite man could see of Him. But we are not in Eden; we are not pure, but sinful, and so there is much in us that does not suggest the true God, and much wanting in us needed to suggest many truths which

might be known by us of God. For us, therefore, to think of God as an enlarged image of ourselves is a mistake.

How then are we to reach any right knowledge of Him? Our Lord Himself answers the question when He says, "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God," and it certainly is in the way of a greater purity in our feelings, rather than of a greater keenness in our thinkings, that we must set ourselves if we are to reach the knowledge of God. The same truth is further taught by Christ when He says, "If any man wishes to do God's will he shall know of the doctrine whether it be of God"; and it is indeed true that just as the heart is pure, and the will at one with the will of God, that God is seen. Pure it may be with a deep and very sorrowful sense of past impurity, the light showing us both God and ourselves. For we cannot see God as He is, and not see ourselves also as we have been and still are.

It strengthens our trust in such truths to remember, that many of those who get light enough to see some outlines of the true God, are forthwith overwhelmed by an alarmed sense of His justice and truth. The cause being that justice and truth are the parts, so to speak, of the first purity of the soul which sin has least defaced. There are few men who are not able to form some true idea of justice and truth; for selfishness itself leads us to

take a clear view of these, that for our own sake we may claim them from others. The teaching of our Lord takes the same line, when He makes our pardon from God turn on our readiness to forgive those who have hurt ourselves. The unforgiving spirit is not fit to understand God's mercy, and therefore to believe in it.

But there are at any rate a few who, from another cause, fail to see God as He really is. The passion of revenge is very weak in them. It is their nature not to be made angry by wrongs done to themselves or to others. They might be glad of this, did it not for the most part arise from a deadness of soul to justice, which hinders them seeing any difficulty in pardoning sin, and allows them therefore to make light of their own sins. Sin is to God, they suppose, very much what it is to themselves; and so they see no need of an Advocate with the Father, or of the propitiation for sin. Thus their God is wanting, like themselves, in those qualities which lie at the root of all true greatness of character. He is good, but His goodness is nothing better than that weak easiness of temper, which in our fellow men we distrust.

We see then how it is that if we are to know God we ourselves must be more or less like God. No doubt we never can be infinite as God is. But to know God a man does not need to be infinite. He does not need to be God, but like God; and

those attributes of God which, if he is to know God, he must share, can be infinite no more in God than in man. We are not thinking of the real meaning of words if we speak of infinite truth, or infinite justice. A saying that is true cannot be made more true than it is, far less infinitely more true. An act that is just cannot be made infinitely more just. Superhuman knowledge and wisdom may be needed for one to be always and altogether just and true, but not for being in point of character just, and true, and merciful, and loving. A very small soul may have these attributes, and thus know God. "Not many wise," saith St. Paul, "are called." What is needed by us is the wisdom which lieth in the guilelessness of a child.

But here a man may say, I know what I call justice and truth, and I think I am just and true, but how am I to know that I have these qualities in the same sense in which God has them? Indeed it would seem from many things done by God in the world that His justice, if indeed He is just, is not the same as mine. Now, of course, we cannot practise any virtues on the large scale of God, and we know that virtues on another scale, or in a new sphere, change as it were their dress, though not their character; as when a kind judge sends a man to death, or an upright tax-gatherer seizes the money of his neighbour, or a generous almsgiver refuses help to a spendthrift. How likely is it that

in the dealings of God with a universe, or with eternity, there may be manifestations of His attributes which we cannot see to belong to them, and which can never, by giving us an example, help us to exercise them ourselves.

We see then how needful it is that God should give us a standard, suited to our measure, for the use by us of the attributes which we have as well as He. That standard is His law, whereby He shows us what are the eternal and unchanging facts, as seen by Him in the light in which He eternally is, the knowledge of which belongs to His being as God, as it must for our good belong to us also, as men made in the image of God. Therefore is it that just as we keep the commandments of God, watching and guarding them, as of greater worth than all else that is ours, we have a right to think that we are in sympathy with God, that our character is so far at least not unlike His, and that we are thus fit to know Him. "His righteousness," saith the Psalmist, "is an everlasting righteousness, and His law is *the* truth." It is in this light then that we must look on the law of God. It is the truth, seen by God, as it must be by us, if we are to partake of His nature. Keeping this too in mind that the only way of understanding that law, and of knowing what it really means, is to strive without ceasing to obey every part of it. For merely to study it, without making proof of it in our own

lives, gives us no real knowledge either of it, or of its Author.

Hence the truth of this verse, and of the negative form in which it is put in the verse that follows; the Apostle giving fresh force to what he has said, by blaming as false the man who says that he knows God, and yet does not keep His commandments. Such an one is not in error only; he states what he knows, or at least might know, to be untrue. His deeper sense of truth tells him that the master, whose servant his sins show him to be, and who is really the only god he knows, is not the true God.

It is to be marked how great the weight thus given to the witness borne by each man's reason and conscience, which, though he may deny it, he does feel to be among the very few certainties he has. As for ourselves, if, instead of setting conscience at naught, we acknowledge its authority, and with it the authority of the laws to which it bears witness, then if we say we know God, we are not guilty of falsehood. But surely we show a weakness, felt by us to be indeed sinful, if at every moment we are not forcing our passions to obey those laws. If we fail in this, then, even though the commandment we have broken may be among the least of them, we, if we know God, will come before Him in sorrowful confession, seeking pardon, and grace to help us. Could there be no knowledge of God apart from a perfect keeping of His laws,

then, in this world at least, no man could know God. At the same time it is clear that since the greater will be our obedience to His law the more we prize it, so the real worth of what we think to be our knowledge of God may well be measured by the obedience we give Him. St. John certainly knew that our acquaintance with God will keep pace with the growth of righteousness, and that it will be filled up to the measure of each of us, only when we have passed from the dim light that is outside of our Father's house, into the full light which is within it.

Chap. II. v. 5.

But whoso keepeth His word, in him verily hath the love of God been perfected. Hereby know we that we are in Him.

We have seen that we may find out how much we have got of a true knowledge of God, by marking the point up to which we are keeping His law. But we may come to a nearer acquaintance with God, to a closer kinship with Him, than that which the keeping of His commandments shows us to have reached. We may not only *know God*; we can be *in God*. This place we are here told that we reach, when the love of God is perfected in us, and that we may know when it is perfected in us, and that we therefore are in God, when we are aware that we

are keeping His word. Clearly, then, to be in God is more than to know God. But it is not easy to say what the Apostle means by being "in God." St. Paul often uses a like phrase, but only when he is speaking of the oneness of the believer and Christ. Our Lord also takes it in the same sense, and also as setting forth what He is with the Father. In each of these cases the meaning of the phrase is clearly not quite the same, though in all of them closest intimacy and fellowship are no doubt meant. Here the phrase surely points to a very close acquaintance with God. The idea of it rises out of the greater knowledge we have of anything, when we have seen the inside, as well as the outside of it. We often speak of going into a case, or of getting at the heart of a subject, meaning that we are acquainting ourselves with more than all that lies on the face of it.

St. John seems to mean more than this, when he speaks of being in God; but this is part, at least, of his meaning, and it is a sense of his words which fits in with what else he is now teaching. He has been speaking of that knowledge of God which the keeping of His commandments brings with it. Now he would go on to that deeper knowledge of the heart of God, to reach which the love of God must be perfected in us; and the proof of our having which is to be found, not in the keeping His commandments, but in keeping His word.

With St. John the commandments of God, and His word, are not the same. His word takes in a far wider field than His commandments, and there is therefore much more in the keeping of the one than of the other; and clearly much more of the whole man is taken up in doing so. The laws of God may be kept by one who has no higher knowledge of God than that He has authority and power to enforce them. This is really to know much of God; and in the man who has that knowledge, reason and conscience are doing their right work. But his heart may be doing no work. Indeed, when God is known only as an all-powerful Lawgiver, the heart may be often set against Him. The reason and conscience, as well as self-love, may bid us keep the law, while the Lawgiver is disliked, or not loved. When the commandments are not kept, there can be no knowledge of God; but they can be kept, the Apostle would tell us, with a knowledge of God which takes with it no love to Him. This is a painful state of soul, for it has to do with God only as a slave with his master. The man knows God so far, but he is not *in* God.

God is not known to us only by His commandments—His word takes in much more; and everywhere in it we find, besides law, that which takes hold, not of reason or conscience only, but also of the heart. God has never stopped short with law;

He has never been pleased with a slavish obedience. He gives Adam, not only all the trees in the garden, save one, but all else in the world. In the hour of man's fall, He makes him the greatest of all promises; and all through the ages of man's sin, He has never left Himself without a witness to the pity and long-suffering of His love, thus seeking a place in the heart of man. All this we find in His word, which at last tells us of Him who, though from the beginning He was with God and was God, yet was made flesh that for us He might die. The infinite and all-pervading Spirit, too vast to find room in our hearts, thus seeking to gain a place in them, by sending His Son, intelligible to us in His human nature, to stand at the door of them and knock. All this we find in His word, and therefore the man who keeps it must be quite another from the man who keeps the commandments only. He keeps or guards that word, not from fear, but from a grateful and loving sense of the goodness of God in it, and thus rises to a knowledge of God which fills his heart up to its utmost fulness. In him the Apostle says the love of God is perfected.

This phrase, "The Love of God," means here the kind of love which belongs to God, and is characteristic of Him. There are other senses in which the phrase is used elsewhere, when it means God's love to us, or our love to God. And certainly it would not have been out of place here to note

that the word of God stands alone in giving us a clear view of His love, and has therefore ever been found to awaken best our love to Him. But the aim of the Apostle here is clearly to mark out the kind of love, felt by the man who keeps the word of God, and which alone can fit him to enter into the depths of God, so that he shall be in God. A love that can bring this about must be of the same kind as that which belongs to God, and which is so very unlike much that is called love among men.

To love as God loves is indeed to touch the very highest point of goodness. The intellect cannot carry us thither, nor can faith and hope themselves do more than lift our souls up to this height. Their best work indeed is ended when they have done this, for when we love as God loves, then His love is perfected in us, then we are in God, in truest fellowship with Him, seeing what He sees, feeling what He feels. Then are we in the light as He is in the light. Only love can understand love; only a Godlike love can understand the love of God. It is indeed true that this love has never yet been made perfect while we are here on earth. But the Apostle, here as elsewhere, is thinking of the Christian life as it ought to be, as that towards which it tends, and which we will one day reach. Meanwhile, in all Christian people, this love bears some clear proportion to the care with which the word of God is kept. That love and that care have

an equal growth beside each other in the living soul and in the living church.

Chap. II. v. 6.

He that saith he abideth in Him ought himself also to walk even as He walked.

The Apostle now takes another onward step. He has spoken of our having the knowledge of God, then of our loving God, now of our abiding in God. There has been a rise from a lower to a higher point, here to the highest point of all, not only to be in God but to abide in Him. Of this abiding both our Lord and the Apostle Paul speak strongly. "If ye keep My commandments ye shall abide in My love": and both Christ and St. Paul urge the need of our continuing in the faith grounded and settled. Nor uselessly is this continuing,—this abiding, asked of us. For indeed we may reach a high knowledge of God, and even feel towards Him and our neighbour some of this divine love, and yet afterwards like the angel of the Church of Ephesus leave it, or fall from it, with the deadly issue set forth in the sixth chapter of the Epistle to the Hebrews. God, once seen, may be lost sight of; the word of God, once tasted as good, may be cast from us; the first love may wax cold; the heart once tender may be hardened, so as never more to feel.

Let us therefore beware of saying "*I know*" when we ought to say "*I knew*": or "*I love*" with a divine love, when the truth is only, "*I once so loved.*" We have in dreams seen such things as belong not to our waking hours, and cannot be recalled in them. And it is so sometimes with our lives, the earlier beliefs and feelings of which so fade away as to be beyond all recovery, even by the imagination. We once beheld, but we went our way, and now forget what manner of vision it was we saw. But there are times when we would fain rest on the fact that we once saw, once beheld, once loved; and therefore St. John, who never, even in an hour of highest thought, forgets our foolishness, would call us back from all seeking in the past,—from gathering the ashes of dead feelings as the ground of rest, by forcing on us the fact of what we are and are doing *now*. He tells us that if a love like the love of God be abiding in our hearts, there will be a life answering to it. We shall be found walking as Christ walked, living day by day as Christ lived. For the heart will certainly lay its law on the life, and make it obedient, so that if we continue to have the love that was Christ's, ours will also be the life that was His. Not that we shall be found doing, or trying to do, the very same things which He did. We will not try to walk on the sea, or to heal the sick as He did. Nor shall we, who are beside Him

but as weak children, run with His swift and firm step towards every good end. But we, walking as best we can on this earth which He also trod, will each of us strive, up to our measure, to be not unlike Him in our hearts and in our lives, trying to keep up the spirit, the temper, the same mind, which was in Him when He was where we now are, aiming at a meekness, and lowliness, and unselfishness not unlike His, thus taking His yoke upon us, and learning of Him, striving to please those about us for their good to edifying, even as He pleased not Himself, walking in love as He also loved us, and gave Himself for us. Certainly this is what the Christian ought to do. It must be the rule of his life. No commandment of God has on him a more binding force than to walk as Christ also walked.

Chap. II. vv. 7, 8.

Beloved, no new commandment write I unto you, but an old commandment which ye have had from the beginning: the old commandment is the word which ye heard. Again, a new commandment write I unto you, which thing is true in Him and in you; because the darkness is passing away, and the true light already shineth.

It is of the duty of walking as Christ also walked that the Apostle now speaks as a commandment.

It takes in all the other commandments. For the life of Christ was spent in keeping the whole law of His Father, and therefore it lets us see how each part of the law should be kept. We learn from it that all duty is summed up in loving God and our neighbour, or, as St. Paul puts it, that "love is the fulfilling of the law." But in these verses there is more than this. St. John has clearly in his mind the words of Christ which we find in his Gospel (John XII. 34), "*A new commandment,*" saith He, "*I give you, that ye love one another, even as I have loved you, that ye also love one another.*"

The act which went before these words, and gave them force, was the washing by Christ of the disciples' feet. This service left a deep mark on the mind of St. John. It must have given him the fresh sense of a new idea; and now after all these years it had not lost that freshness. He wishes greatly to make us feel the beauty and goodness of this law of love, and he would therefore rest it on an authority higher than his own. He recalls the scene that so strongly moved him, and would have us see it, and feel about it as he did. It is no new law that he is laying on the Christian Church. It is the old commandment which they had from the beginning. It is the well-known word which had been preached to them at the first. Their great Master had uttered it while yet on earth, and He had enforced it by all that He did and suffered,

obeying it without fail in His life and in His death.

The form in which our Lord put this law of His love is often overlooked. There is a great natural law which is often quoted in the place of it, by both the friends and the foes of the Gospel. A great law which we find in the Old Testament,[1] and even in the teaching of heathen men, and which our Lord laid down as the foundation of all just dealing. Christ gives it in the words, "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself,"[2] that is to say, you shall love him as much as you love yourself, as much, but not more. On this rule all justice rests between man and man. We must not gain by another's loss, we must not take pleasure out of another's pain, we must not prosper by another's harm. This it is which all human law, that has aught of equity in it, tries to lay down; and the great task to which every good government sets itself is in the best way to make men keep this law. But, let us never forget that the law of Christ goes far beyond this. It is that we are to walk as He walked, that we are to love one another as *He loved us*. That love of Christ does not stop short at justice, it gives far more than justice could ask. It humbles itself. It forgets itself. It sacrifices itself. So far from claiming equal rights, it claims none. When Christ, as if He had been the servant of the apostles,

[1] Lev. XIX. 18. [2] Matt. XXII. 39.

washed their feet, He said to them, "*Know ye what I have done unto you? If I, the Lord and Master, have washed your feet, ye ought also to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that ye also should do as I have done to you.*" This touches us closely; but what shall we say of the lesson He gives us of His love when He willingly died for us? Indeed, St. John tells us (Chap. III. 16) that we can know what love really is, only by seeing it in Him, laying down His life for us. Nor is this love to be seen only in the Son of God: it is shown us by the Father when He for us, who loved Him not, sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins.

Such then is the kind of love which Christ would have us feel when He tells us to love one another as He loved us. And it is a life, ever under the power of such love, that St. John wishes us to lead, when He tells us to walk as Christ also walked.

We can see then how he calls this a new commandment, and yet an old one. Old, for it did not take its rise in him, but was to be found in the first Gospel message, and was laid on all Christians from the beginning of their life in Christ. Yet at the same time new, and ever new, because a fresh sense of what it really means and claims comes to us with each one of the many cases with which, as we go on in life, we see that it has to do. But new in this also, that each onward step that we

take in the knowledge of Christ forces on us reasons hitherto unseen why we should keep this law. There is indeed no region of the Christian life, in which we find so much that is new and unlooked-for, as in the lessons for our daily life which we get from the law of a Christlike charity.

The Apostle goes on to say that this new commandment, which he calls "*This thing,*" is *true* in Christ, and in all Christians. What does he here mean by *True*? Now in Scripture, as in our daily speech, the word stands not merely for the giving over unchanged by our mind to the mind of another, by words or otherwise, of something we know, so that he shall get it just as we have it. It means often the real, instead of the seeming—that which is, not that which we think to be. Not so often it must be taken, as in this place, for that which fits, as a key the lock which it opens, or a medicine the disease which it heals, or a plan the difficulty it solves. That, in short, which puts things right which are wrong, which, disentangling confusion, brings about order, supplying wants, stopping gaps, knitting together broken links, making useful that which without it is useless, or beautiful that which by itself is uncomely. That which does this in each case is the *True*. What the Apostle therefore here means is that the great law of love fits into the facts, the realities, of human nature in the best way, giving it a finished beauty,

and putting into it what it lacked, for its smooth working. Nothing else, the Apostle would tell us, could bring about so much good; and he is sure that we can see this clearly to be the case in Christ and in ourselves. This law of love, he says, "*Is true in Him and in you.*" Without this love all the glory of the life of Christ would be gone. We see how it was needed to make perfect all that He was and did. We see the boundless usefulness of that life to us and to the world. But what good could that life, or that death have done, but for the love which ruled Christ in both?

Think next of yourselves, saith St. John; think how your thoughts, your feelings, your lives, your treatment of others, are all changed. You are happier; you are in all ways better than you were; your old difficulties in dealing with others you now no longer feel. Doubts as to the things it were best for you to do are gone. Whence the change? Has it not clearly followed on your obedience to the law of love? Have you not felt that all the good has come to you from your walking as Christ also walked, and that you have had just as much of that good as your life was like the life of Christ? You, if you be really Christians, must be seeing this to be a fact, for with you the darkness, though not past, is passing away. You are beginning to see what is the cure for the evils which hurt you, and which press so heavily on the world. You

have been walking hitherto by the misleading light of selfish wisdom, or trying to find your way by the feeble sparks kindled by mere human teachers, and you know how very useless you found them to be. But the true light is ever shining to you from the face of Jesus Christ, and in it you see that obedience to the law of love is indeed best for your own highest well-being, and for the highest well-being of all with whom you have anything to do.

When St. John wrote, the darkness was passing away. No doubt he hoped that it would be soon altogether gone. How sad it is that after all these long years it is still only passing away. How few have come really to see that the law of unselfish love—of love like that of God—is the only cure for the evils which press on mankind. We see the beauty of obedience to this law in Jesus Christ, and in the few who have walked in any wise as He walked. We see the good thus done and we praise it. But how hard it is to make this law of love our own, and to believe that if we obeyed it our lives too would be beautiful and full of good. A world in which all obeyed it would simply be heaven; for there the highest glory which can be reached is to be like Christ.

CHAP. II. VV. 9-11.

He that saith he is in the light, and hateth his brother, is in the darkness even until now. He that loveth his brother abideth in the light, and there is none occasion of stumbling in him. But he that hateth his brother is in the darkness, and walketh in the darkness, and knoweth not whither he goeth, because the darkness hath blinded his eyes.

St. John saw that the law of a Godlike love opened for his children a door of escape from the greater miseries of life. Were it obeyed man would almost cease to mourn. It is seen to bear this happy power, he adds, because in Christians darkness is passing away and the true light is already shining. But—and this is the next question asked by the watchful care of St. John—is each man among them sure that he is in that light, and thus able really to see the glory of this law of love? He may say that he is, and think so. But this is not enough. His answer to a question, on which so much hinges, needs a test, such as that whereby he has been told to try the reality of his fellowship with God (Chap. I. vv. 6, 7). There St. John had said, that if we are really in the light we shall have fellowship one with another. Now he goes further, and adds that if we are in the light we, each one of

us, shall be under the law of a Godlike love to each other, and thus have found the way to true happiness.

Our journey through life is full of danger. The horrible pit and the miry clay are on either side of our path, with snares laid between. How are we to make our way along such a path? Not certainly without light. But if we are in the light we shall see these dangers, and be able to keep clear of them; so that there will be no "*occasion of stumbling*" in us. But again the question—Am I in the light? The Church is in the light, and I belong to the Church, but that is not enough. Can I, standing by myself, say I am in the light? Now in the natural world a man could scarcely put such a question; he could not mistake darkness for light. But it is not so in the inner world of our souls. There it is easy to mistake knowledge of words lodged in the memory, or dealt with like algebraic symbols, for clear spiritual insight. It is easy to make ourselves think that we are seeing as God sees, and feeling as God feels, and therefore knowing what God sees and feels, because we have got hold of words, which set forth the realities of the universe. But this is not to be in the light. It is at best to hold in our hand the lamp, which if kindled would give us light. Since then we can be thus mistaken, by what art are we to find out whether we are in the light as God is in the light,

seeing, feeling, and loving like Him? St. John will soon tell us, but first he will make clear to us what that is which, without fail, will show a man that he is not in the light, not feeling and loving as God feels and loves. "*He that saith he is in the light and hateth his brother is in darkness?*"

The word hatred means with us a very strong feeling. But not so here. With St. John, a narrow line—that of simple justice—is drawn between love and hatred. On the one side of that line lies, loving self more than our brother; on the other side is, loving our brother more than self. On the one side the distance from love lengthens out till it reaches what we call hate; on the other side the distance from hate stretches onward till it reaches what we now know as Godlike love—the love of Christ. On the one side of this line is darkness, with its ignorance, its mistakes, its dangers; on the other side is light, with its clear and ready knowledge and safety. On which side of this line then am I? Be certain, saith the Apostle, that you are on the dark side of it, if you hate your brother.

Near indeed to us the Apostle comes with this test. Do not, as if he said, do not go very far to seek the person through your feelings to whom this test is to do its work. Above all, do not ask if you are hating God. For, though you may not see it, that is the very question you wish to settle and about which the whole doubt lies. Take the man

nearest to you—your brother—your mother's son—your fellow Christian—your fellow man. Look round on all the people who are nearest to you, whom you know best, and about whom you cannot but have some feeling, and simply ask, Do I hate any one of all these?

But it may be said, This cannot be a fair test, for there are many whom I do not like, and I am right in not liking them. But the question is not about *liking*, but about *loving* as God loves, and, in St. John's sense of the word love, one can like without loving, and love without liking. The question therefore must take another shape. You do not like the man, but would you like to see him hurt, or to hurt him yourself? Or, being moved with pity, would you wish to do him good? If he is bad, would you wish to save him from his evil ways and to make him, if you can, good and happy. Are you, or are you not, feeling and acting towards that man as Christ felt and acted towards you? Are you ready to make some sacrifice for the sake of the man you do not like?

This is in the line of all Christ's teaching. "Love your enemies; do good to them that hate you; pray for them that despitefully use you." If in this sense we are loving our brother, then are we not in the darkness, but in the light; we are seeing others as God sees them, feeling towards them as God feels, walking as Christ also walked. If we keep this in

mind we shall be saved from many sins, and also from many perplexities. It is often said, How can we love our enemies? It cannot be right to love bad people. The clear answer is, You ought to love them as Christ loved them and you. He hated sin as you never hated it. None of us was ever so cruelly treated as He was, and yet He loved sinners, His enemies, with so strong a pity that He died for them; and never by word or deed did He hurt those who harmed Him most.

Perhaps we feel that to forget self as Christ did, to care like Him for others, even the most thankless and unworthy, would be to spoil our lives. And no doubt it would spoil them in the sense in which Christ's was spoiled—spoiled, as all those thought and think who live in the darkness, but made altogether perfect in the sight of the Father, and of all who like Him are in the light. It is always said by those who are in the darkness, that to make our way in life we must care for self in the first place, and leave others to take care of themselves. But—and this is the great lesson of the Apostle—nothing can be more unwise. They who care only for self are in the darkness until now. The true light is shining, but they will not use it. They are people who choose midnight for their journey along a broken road. It was of them our Lord was thinking when He said "whosoever will save his soul shall

lose it."[1] For indeed the mistakes and losses, which we trace to want of thought or wisdom in taking care of ourselves, really spring from our taking more thought for ourselves than for others, or, as the Apostle puts it, from not walking as Christ also walked. Our lives would be far happier, and marked by fewer mistakes, if we cared for our neighbour more and for ourselves less; for "*he that loveth his brother abideth in the light, and there is none occasion of stumbling in him.*" He blocks up neither his own nor his neighbour's path; he falls into none of the pitfalls or snares, which in the darkness he could not have shunned; nor does he make others think little of the light, as those do who boast that they are in it, and yet are, as we see, wallowing in the miry clay. He does not stumble along a dark road not knowing whither he goeth. He has light to see ever before him the footsteps of Christ, and he knows that if he follows them he shall never wander on the dark mountains, but obtain at last an abundant entrance into the kingdom of his Lord and Saviour.

How good for us all if we could act on the belief that to be like Christ is to be truly wise, even for this life, and that it is always foolish to be unlike Him—to believe that on the one side are linked together light, and love, and life, and on the other side darkness, and discord, and death.

[1] Matt. XVI. 25, R.V. Margin.

One saddest result of walking in the darkness St. John keeps to the last. As in the outer, so in the inner world, the man who lives long in darkness loses the faculty of sight, "the darkness blindeth his eyes." And if so, when and where can he get his sight back again? Must he be blind for evermore?

Chap. II. vv. 12-14.

I write unto you, my little children, because your sins are forgiven you for His name's sake. I write unto you, fathers, because ye know Him which is from the beginning. I write unto you, young men, because ye have overcome the evil one. I have written unto you, little children, because ye know the Father. I have written unto you, fathers, because ye know Him which is from the beginning. I have written unto you, young men, because ye are strong, and the word of God abideth in you, and ye have overcome the evil one.

The Apostle has taught us that the rule, which is above all others in its wisdom, is simply to walk as Christ also walked. If to this we take heed we shall overcome all real difficulties, and escape disappointments and failures. We are to love others as Christ loved us, and we are to remember that to

love self rather than others is not only wrong but foolish, for we thus fail to secure any real good to self. On this love to others as a law new, and yet old, St. John has enlarged, and evidently with the hope of doing good to those to whom he is writing. Whence this good hope? Now there are those to whom it is vain to speak, or to write, about some things. It is, our Lord reminds us, worse than useless to cast pearls before swine. It is as with a pearl of great price that St. John will deal with this law of love. He will not cast it to those who will trample it under foot. To the world it has ever been a hard, unbearable saying. For the characteristic of the world is love of self. So that the man who even for an hour rises out of selfishness into Christlike love to his neighbour is, for that hour at least, not of the world, or in darkness.

But the world, and notably the world when St. John wrote, had not eyes to see what St. John had to show it. The very light that was in it was darkness. Its best philosophies, its wisest rules for living well, were all selfish. It took pleasure in naked cruelty; the claims of weakness or misery were slighted by it. The darkness in our day is not so deep as it was then. For Christ has done much even for those who do not truly know Him. Wherever He comes He is the "Saviour of all men"[1] from many evils. Still it is very hard even

[1] 1 Tim. IV. 10.

now to make any man see—nay, to make ourselves see—that greater and better than all the spiritual luxuries given us by Faith and Hope is the good which comes to us from this love. But St. John felt that they to whom he was writing were able to see the value of his great lesson. What he knew of them, and of their history as Christians, gave him good hope of this. As for himself, he ever had, and ever would, put this law of love in the foremost place. Thrice he goes over the words "*I write,*" and thrice "*I have written.*" He has always urged, and will never cease to urge, the necessity of walking as Christ also walked, and of all Christians loving each other as He loved us.

In this passage he at first seems to us to be speaking to three sets of Christians, unlike each other in knowing, some more, some less, of the Christian life. First the little children, or little ones, young in years, or in the Christian life. Then the older men in the Church, and lastly the youths who believed. And certainly none were so likely to hearken to the Apostle, when he calls to Christian love, as those who are young, either in years or in freshness of Christian feeling. It is chiefly because of this that our Lord would have us all become as little children. But it is more likely that by this name St. John means all Christians. He has so called them already in the first verse of this chapter, and it is the whole body of Christians that

he speaks to as little children towards the end of it, and in those that follow. Besides, what he here says to children touches all who through Christ are forgiven, and who know God as their Father. The distinction between fathers and young men is clearly not official. St. John thinks of fathers as having greater knowledge, more thoughtfulness and a riper wisdom; while young men are full of zeal, of action, and of strength in warfare.

It has been somewhat uselessly asked, whether the Apostle, when he changes in these verses from the present to the past,—from "*I am writing*" to "*I have written,*" is speaking first of this Epistle, and then of his Gospel; or it may be of another Epistle now lost. What he clearly means is no more than that all he writes has the same aim, and that one thought is always uppermost in his mind. It is not strange that the loving Apostle should thus set on high a love which is the same as Christ's for him. St. Paul gives it no lower place when he sets Charity above Faith and Hope, and our Lord seeks from His people nothing more earnestly than that, like the service which He did them, should be their service to others. Therefore St. John with good hope will urge a Christlike self-forgetfulness on his children—his little ones, who had listened to his Gospel. He sees in their turning to Christ the first step towards that likeness to Him in His love, to bring up which is, and ever must

be, the chief aim of all that God does with His children.

The first ground on which St. John hopes that all Christian people will listen to him, as he urges the great duty of Christian love, is that their sins have been forgiven them. The second is that they have known the Father. We shall find him saying much afterwards of the force of these facts. But meanwhile we should mark how strongly he feels that the forgiveness of our sins by God for Christ's sake is the great argument with us for holiness. The Gospel trusts for its power over us, not on our fears, nor on our hope of gain, but on our gratitude to God for wishing to forgive us. We see that the Gospel everywhere rests its hope of having free course on earth on man's sense of the perfect goodness of Christ, and on sympathy with Him in His love. Surely no man can think of making what gain he can from that love, and not see the beauty of it. In the world indeed men often sneer at the love which serves them, thinking it a foolish weakness. But a true Christian cannot be so base. St. John is sure that they to whom much has been forgiven will love much.

The second reason why he thinks that his children will give heed to him is that they "know the Father." If they are thankful to Christ, not less thankful must they be to Him who sent His well-beloved Son to be their Saviour. If they see the

glory of the love of God in their forgiveness, and in saving them from utter loss, surely they will see that there is a like glory in their forgiveness of each other, and in each man trying to lift his neighbour from among the evils that are besetting him.

St. John seems to have had no special reason for calling his converts, first "little children," and then "little ones." He thus gives utterance to his kindly feeling to those whom he had known in their helplessness. He had seen their great need, and it was this that first drew his heart to them, when he went among them as the messenger of Christ, and he knew that it was nothing else than a still deeper knowledge of the sorrows and helplessness of man that drew out towards himself the love of God. Surely any man, who believes that his only plea with God was his wretchedness and helplessness, will feel the force of the same appeal, when it is made to himself, by the feeble, the miserable, the sinful, among whom he lives; otherwise he surely merits the condemnation laid on the heavily encumbered man, who, having been forgiven by his master "all that great debt," went out to force from a fellow servant the few pence which he could claim.

Let it be noticed, in passing, that St. John has clearly no doubt that all believers in Christ should, as a duty, be assured of the forgiveness of their sins for Christ's sake, and of their relationship to God as their Father; remembering, however, that the

question has always to be put, whether some, who are most sure of their pardon and Sonship, are really believing in the true Christ—or in any Christ.

We now come to St. John's address to the older members of the Church. We might think that their ripe knowledge of life would always have taught old men that selfishness misses its aim. But if this lesson is taught, it is seldom learned. Self-love seems to grow with age. Old men have outlived those to whom they owed service, and find around them only those who owe service to them. They cannot but see that their past endeavours to please themselves, without thought of others, have for the most part failed; but for this they blame their plans, rather than their principles. The Apostle knows this, and therefore his hope, that old men will escape from their besetting temptations rests on this: that "*they have known Him who was from the beginning.*"

There can be no doubt that by these words St. John means Jesus Christ, whom he had set forth in his Gospel as, in the beginning, God, and with God; who, being thus the Ancient of days, must ever be to the oldest men, among those who know Him, the object of dutiful service, and is thus in a special way the Saviour of the aged from the pride of self.

But St. John has no doubt a larger reason for

speaking thus of Christ, whose true Divinity here becomes a weighty truth. To know Christ, in his perfect unselfishness, simply as a man, should indeed shame our love of self. The beauty of His life, the mighty ends it served, the growing glory of it, shining through the gloom that gathered round it, may well lead us to give Him the highest place in our hearts, and to make us strive to be like Him. But did we know Jesus as only a man, the very glory of His sinless life, while it would range us on His side, would at the same time set us against God, who gave up to suffering such an one as He was. The more clearly we see the goodness of Jesus, the more would we recoil from the injustice of God towards our brother man. But if Jesus be not only man, but also God; if that suffering life was led, not by a wonderful creature, given over to sorrow, that it might be shown how patient and obedient a being God could make, but was the life of the Creator Himself, manifest in the flesh, suffering of His own choice for our good, then much indeed is added to the lessons of that life. But besides, we are drawn most powerfully towards God, from whom, but for this knowledge of Him in Christ, we would have shrunk. More than the young, must old men be thus moved who have long known life in the world, and felt much about the ways of God in it. They can best judge how priceless is the truth, that to know Christ is to know God, that the

example of Christ is the example of God, and that the sacrifices, which He asks our love to make for Him in the course of a long life, are small, when put beside those which for us He laid on Himself.

St. John then thinks that the knowledge of the true Divinity and eternal being of our Lord will urge and help old men to believe in the great law of love. But when he speaks of Christ as "*from the beginning,*" he points to all that in the first verses of his Gospel he had said of the Word. By Him all things were made. He is the source of life. He has been ever present and active in the world. The aged man who has learned from history what has happened on earth, who has gathered also the lessons of a long life, and has seen his Lord as the God of Providence, must have come to feel how truly at one is the character of Christ with His judgments, or final sentences on the doings of man. He must have seen that the eternal law of the universe is that the righteousness, which narrowly looks into and allows *all* the claims of others, is that which from the beginning alone exalteth a man, a nation, or a God; while unkindness, or forceful wrong, or even thoughtlessness, bring with them only loss and shame. Under the rule of Him who is from the beginning, it has been so, and must be so, everywhere and always. To this knowledge of Christ, and of the great principles which ever guided His life, and His rule, the

Apostle can add no further reason for hoping that old men will welcome and obey the law of Godlike love.

The grounds on which St. John looked for obedience to that law in young men are, that "*they are strong*," that the "*word of God abideth in them*," and that they "*have overcome the wicked one*." They have had many hard struggles with sin, they have been much tempted to please themselves, and to have no thought of the righteous claims of God, and of their neighbours. Moreover, they have fought not with flesh and blood only. They have had as a foe that evil one who sets himself against all righteousness. If with him they have fought out the good fight, they must have seen that to please self is to lose the battle, to deny self is to gain it. It had been so, they knew, with the great Captain of their salvation. He had overcome through the sacrifice of Himself. And since they too had gained the day, and thus shown themselves strong, they know that their strength had lain in what had been the power of Christ's might: a might, that is to say, which had belonged to none other as to Him, the might of devotedness—a might which, in so far as they had it, could be traced back to its source in the word of God, which, if it abides in any man, recalling at every hour to his thoughts and feelings, all that it tells of the love of Christ, arms him with the great sword of the

spirit, wherewith he triumphs over evil; even when his youth makes the time of his struggle the very hour and power of darkness. But more than this, all these thoughts and feelings are deepened and strengthened when the young man comes to see that it is when Christ Himself is at his right hand that he is not greatly moved.

Chap. II. vv. 15, 16.

Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the vainglory of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world.

St. John has told his children why he believes that they will listen to him, while he urges them to obey the great law of Christian love. But if there is to be love to that which is on the one side, there must be no love to that which is on the other side. We shrink from the opposite of that which attracts us. The duty to love some things means that there is an equal duty to dislike some other things. No man can serve two masters. Very suitably then does St. John here tell us not to love the world.

But what does he mean by "*the World*"? This

may seem a needless question. But indeed it is not easy to give a clear meaning to the word. For if it is often used, it is perhaps as often misused, by those whose religion shows itself chiefly in their hasty judgments on others. But when rightly used, as here by the Apostle, what does it mean? Now we know that God made the world, and it is surely right to love the world as God made it, beautiful and very good. There is another world as man has made it, a sinful and most unhappy world. But it was that world which God so loved as to give for its good His only begotten Son. Why then are we not to love the world?

Now the world as God made it is good, and man is the lord of it. It was given to him as his, that he might use it, working in it, and rejoicing in the fruits of it, with all their pleasantness and beauty. It is his still, so that he may not leave it, or have nothing to do with it, for it is still his business "to dress it, and to keep it," as well as he can. But again, is it not an evil world? Nay! it is so only in this, that man its master is evil, and so does not see the world as God sees it, or use it in God's way: for he would have the world to dress and to keep *him*. God put in the heart of man the great law for using it aright; but he set that law at naught. Had he kept it, it would have been very good for him. This law is none other than that which St. John is urging, the great law of love,

the law of doing all we can to redress the evil we find in the world. But in place of it, man in his folly made a new law. Love thyself, use the world, and all you can grasp in it, not for God, not for your neighbour, but always for yourself, make God Himself useful to yourself, if you can. Do not work for God and the world, but make God and the world work for you. Force your neighbour to serve you, and take care, above all things, that he does not force you to serve him. It is because men thus use the world, that it becomes to them a world of sin and misery. It is this world thus lost, that God loved with boundless pity. It is the same world which sinful man loves with a selfish and even cruel hope. It is thus the world as sinful man sees it, the world as sinful man loves it, that the Christian is not to love. If we could see it as God sees it, we could reach nothing better than to love it as God loves it; for then we would seek to save it, and to be ready, as God was, to make any sacrifice for its real good.

It is then of the world, as made by man the scene and the means of self-pleasing, that St. John speaks here. It is the code of self-seeking maxims and principles, which for the most part rule its use, that we should hate; for it is in them that the worldliness of the world lies. When our Lord speaks of the kingdom of God, He says that it is within us, and within us also is the world that is here meant,

the world of which Satan is the prince. It is not the outward act that is worldly; it is the spirit, the motive, the state of mind. What could be more unworldly, in outward show, than to give all one's goods to feed the poor, or to give one's body to be burned, or to preach in the name of Christ? Yet each of those acts may be worldly, and nothing else, being the outcome of pride and vainglory, or of covetousness, nay, even of envy and strife.

The love of the world, then, is really the love of self. Remembering this, it is often a point of wisdom to forget that there is a list of outward acts, which a formal Christianity calls worldly. For not these only, and possibly not some of these, are everywhere and always wrong; but all that is selfish, unkind, uncharitable, grasping, masterful, is worldly, even though the self-love should be shown in what we are vain of, as our devotion to a church or a creed.

What follows clearly grows out of this. "*Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world,*" which are "*the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life.*" These three, which go to make up the world, answer well to the three temptations offered by Satan to our Lord in the wilderness, which thus help to throw light on what has now been said. We can see nothing wrong in the uses to which Satan urged our Lord to put his new powers. It is right to assuage with

bread the hunger of others or our own; right that the Christ should rule all the kingdoms of the earth, and right that He should swiftly gain a strong hold on the minds of the Jewish people, gathered in the courts of the Temple. But it would have been wrong had Christ made His work easy and pleasant to Himself by the use of powers held by Him for higher ends; wrong had He risen to a selfish sovereignty through the cruelties and deceits by which the worshippers of Satan gain their thrones, and wrong to bring men over to His side by giving them a sign which had in it no lesson of kindness or truth, and which therefore could not touch the heart, or please the conscience.

It is now easy to see the force of the words with which the 13th verse ends: "*If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him.*" The "love of the Father" may be taken in three senses, —either His love to us, or our love to Him, or the kind of love which is in Him as in none other. Now, in the first of these senses, God has love— the love of boundless pity for the man who loves the world. In the second sense, it is clear that there can be no real love to God in the man whose deepest heart is set against Him. By him God cannot even be known. And we have already seen that, in the third sense of the word, there can be no love like the love of God in the heart of the man who loves the world. Yet it is fair to add that in those who

love the world there may be often found, as a survival of man's first likeness to God, so much of His character, as that when moved by a strong quick feeling, they become for a time nobly unselfish, and thus for the time the love of the Father was both in them, and doubtless towards them. For such proof of man's origin in God,—for such preludes of the heavenly state, let us ever be thankful. But no earthly hero ever reached the height of Him, who by determinate counsel died for His enemies. Nay, what man is there among those who are called by the name of Christ, and who profess to have partaken of His Spirit, who has reached, or even tried to reach, the height of the Master's love?

CHAP. II. v. 17.

And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever.

By these words St. John wishes to give fresh strength to his warning against loving the world. Not only does that love leave no place for the love of God, but, further, the world is not fit to be loved by such as we are, for it "*passeth away*." There are some very certain truths, the power of which we seldom feel; and this, in the form in which it

at first strikes us, is one of them. Still, there are times when the shortness of our hold on this earth is forced upon us. The things around us here that fill our minds and hearts do not last; our daily haunts have for ages known, and then ceased to know one set of men after another, and all of these like ourselves. The places will abide, with their unchanging landscapes of hill and sea, but we shall not be there. Nay, we know that the everlasting hills themselves are passing away. The scenes of our work and rest, of our sorrows and joys, of our high aims and shortcomings, shall one day no more be found. Why then should we set our hearts on them?

But these are, indeed, shallow thoughts, beside the deeper meaning of the Apostle. He is thinking of the world which he has been telling us not to love. The world of covetousness and selfishness. It is that world which he sees passing away. Most men know how very soon the sunny world of selfish pleasure is overcast by a cloud of weariness. The habit of seeking such pleasure lasts with us, but the pleasure cannot be found. The men of renown, who once stood out clear on the height of worldly glory, are no longer seen or called to mind; yet they had made the earth to tremble. What Isaiah has grandly said (Is. xiv. vv. 6-20) of one of them may be said of them all, "How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! how art

thou cast down to the ground, thou who didst weaken the nations!"

But St. John is here not thinking so much of the past; he is rather speaking with heavenly wisdom of what then was, and was to be. When he wrote this Epistle there was nothing so great on earth as the Roman Empire. It was planted as it seemed with a steadfastness that could not be shaken. Its grasp of ruling power, its laws, its great men are still wonderful to us. But to St. John it was the embodiment of what he knew as the world; for it lived and ruled and had its being in selfishness. There have indeed been few nations, if indeed any, the principle of whose life has been aught else; but none more clearly than Rome: and therefore, wise as it was in conduct, unfailing in strength, and unshaken as it seemed, St. John foresaw its decline. He knew that it must die, because it had in it the seeds of death. It had lived only for itself and its own greatness, trampling down ruthlessly all who stood in the way of its selfish triumphs. It feared not God, neither regarded man. The Roman Empire was overthrown, as we know, and the history of its decline and fall moves us much, and teaches us much.

It is often asked if our Empire of Britain, so like Rome in many ways, must like her also come to naught. All the great empires of the past have fallen, and so too must ours, if our rule, like theirs,

be godless, and inhuman, and selfish. So, let us be sure, must it ever be with all systems of life, whether of the one or of the many, which are founded on greed, and forgetfulness of the rights of others. Such a system may thrive at the first, rising to great power, and spreading itself like a green bay tree, but its end is death. It passes away, like all else that shows itself to be of the world by denying the righteous claims of God or of man.

It is added by St. John that with the world the lust of it passes away. All the selfish pleasures, the selfish aims, the selfish labours, which the world enjoys and praises, all pass away with it, and leave nothing behind. Hence the soul-hunger, the weary restlessness of many, who make what is called a great rise in life. Hence the well-known truth that the hunting of the world's prizes brings greater enjoyment than is to be found in the prizes themselves. Hence the "vanity of vanities, all is vanity," of the preacher.

"The world passeth away," but the Apostle adds, "*He that doeth the will of God abideth for ever.*" Over against the love of the world is here set the doing the will of God. On the one side is that which pleases self; on the other that which pleases God. The will of God, whether it guides His own acts, or aims at guiding ours, is the outcome of His whole nature—of His knowledge, which takes in

all the facts of the universe, and sees what is best for us, who are in the midst of these facts, and yet know nothing of many of them; but not less the outcome of His love also, which would make us happy. It was that will which sent the Son of God into this world to die for us, and it is the same will which urges on us that we must, for our true well-being, acknowledge all the claims which others have on us, even though we can do this only by making for them a sacrifice like that made by Him for us of His own Son.

A work wrought by any man under this belief will not pass away; it will in some form of good abide for ever. The system, great or small, that rests on this faith, cannot fail in the end. If it be an empire it cannot fall or know decline. It has become part of "the kingdom of God and of His Christ," an "everlasting kingdom, a dominion enduring for ever." It lives, not at the mercy of human blindness or folly, but by the wisdom, and knowledge, and faithful love of God. It is so with the life of each man also, however lowly, who believes in God, and does His will. His faith and service are themselves an inheritance, "incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away." All that fills the mind of such a man, all that brings happiness to him, abides after the earth, and all that is therein, has been burnt up. God will be ever beside him, to be glorified and enjoyed, and

his neighbour also will be there. For heaven, we may be sure, will not be the scene of a remote and selfish happiness. By what works, or by what sacrifices, the man who has become like Christ is there to show forth the grace of a Christlike charity we know not. But the blessedness of heaven is to be pure and lasting; and we can see that the best happiness known to man on earth, the truest honour, the most lasting fame, have been found here by those who have obeyed the great law of loving others as Christ loved us. Let us then, believing that it is only thus that we can receive a kingdom that cannot be moved, seek for grace whereby we may serve in all things the will of God.

Chap. II. vv. 18, 19.

Little children, it is the last hour: and as ye heard that antichrist cometh, even now have there arisen many antichrists; whereby we know that it is the last hour. They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us: but they went out, that they might be made manifest that not all are of us (or, *how that they all are not of us*).

The Apostle now goes on to speak of new dangers which his children must meet. They have been

assailed by the evil one, and the world is against them. These dangers which come from without they had long known; and though they were but as little children they had through the grace of God escaped them. But now they were to be threatened from within their own home.

When a great truth is first set forth, many are taken by it, who come to dislike it when they have looked more closely at it, and thenceforth they become its most embittered foes. It was so with the great truths of the Gospel. St. Paul, speaking to the elders of Ephesus, warned them against an onslaught, not only of grievous wolves from outside the fold, but also of men from among their own selves, who should speak perverse things, and mislead many (Acts xx. 30). St. John here gives the same warning; for this, we easily see, is the main force of the passage. But when we look at the form in which the warning is put, we begin to be at a loss. What does St. John mean by "*the last hour*"? and what by the word "*antichrist*"?

Now, to neither of these questions can we give more than a doubtful answer, nor do we need to give more. Those to whom St. John was writing would understand what he meant, and this part of his message was clearly more to them than to us. It may, however, be said, without much risk of error, that in those early days many believed that the great coming of Christ to judgment was at hand,

and that it was to follow on much trouble and conflict. This great day of the Lord, with its startling signs and wonders, has not yet come. But in a spiritual sense Christ has indeed often come. At various marked points of the world's history, He has clearly manifested His real presence and power. He was soon then to come, when, at the touch of His truth, the world that then was should begin to pass away. (For it is by the link of this passing away that this verse is joined to those which come before it.) St. John knew that before the world of glorified selfishness, embodied in the Roman Empire, began, by its decline, to make it clear that Christ had indeed come to pass judgment upon it, there would be a time to the Church of warfare, and suffering, and temptation. Each such manifestation of the power of Christ, triumphing over the world of evil, and bringing many souls of men under His sway, has followed on a time of struggle and seeming danger to the Church; and it is this time of trial, ushering in the great day, which St. John calls the last hour.

We know that there is often a similar hour of deepest darkness, coming in the life of a man, before that which is to him the great day of the Lord, when Christ coming to him is seen to be real, and with power makes way into his heart, there to reign. Hence indeed is there much comfort to the Church, and to each Christian, when the hour comes to them

of dangerous strife. For as those who watch by night know from the greater cold that the dawn is near, so may a Christian, who knows the times, be sure that strife and painful fightings with error, and unbelief, and prejudice, belong to a "*last time*" which will usher in some notable manifestation of Christ, as clearly present and powerful.

To such an hour of doubt, and division, and temptation, belongs the rising up of an antichrist within the Church, or within the soul. The word "*antichrist*" is used only by St. John, but a danger to the church, from the coming of such an embodiment of error, was foreseen by our Lord Himself. "Many," saith Christ, "shall come in My name and deceive." It would seem from this and other passages that an antichrist is not so much an open foe of Christ, as one within the Church, who, putting on a Christlike mask, tries to take the place of Christ. False Christs, we know, did arise, each giving himself out as a Messiah. But the evil took a more dangerous, because a less alarming shape, when man was upheld as divine, quite apart from the incarnation in Jesus of the Divine word; or some person or thing was put in the room of Jesus, and as doing His work. Any teacher who does this is an antichrist, each acting as herald to the great Antichrist, the man of sin, the lawless one, of the Apostle Paul, who comes at last. And comes not once only in the history of the Church, but, as

with the various spiritual comings of Christ, comes again and again, marking the nearness of each critical epoch, in which the Gospel goes on to new triumphs. What then St. John aims at in this verse is to teach his children that a crisis is at hand. Christ is about to arise in His great power, and to reign over the world, the selfish element of which is passing away before Him. But ere He thus manifests Himself, there will be for His church a great conflict, and much doubt and trouble, for which she must be ready, keeping carefully in mind that the most dangerous foes will arise from among her own children.

That these antichrists were to be seeming Christians was then, and still is, a startling fact. They were men, who, belonging to the Christian body, went out, or disjoined themselves from it. There may indeed be a going out from among the crowd of so called Christians, which, far from being a sin, is a clear duty. That which has life may well cut itself loose from corruption and death. But now those who went out carried with them a deadly taint; for they denied that Jesus was the Christ (see v. 22 and Chap. IV. 5).

The form which this error took we do not fully know, but we can see that its danger lay in its being rooted in what, no doubt, was a wish to uphold what seemed the greatness of God. They who held it showed, and may have felt, much reverence for

Him; and yet St. John knew that they were not Christians at all. They were not in the light, or in fellowship with true believers. A similar danger has vexed the church in all ages. A man is drawn towards Christianity by some view of it which pleased him, and he becomes an acknowledged Christian. But in a little while a deep inner spirit awakens within him, and so sets itself between him and his faith, that he begins to dislike his old beliefs. The shallower nature of the man had been for Christ, as at first he thought Him to be, though the deeper nature—the real man—was all the while against Him. For there is in every man a depth, of which he is often not aware, which is unmoved by fancy, or even by strong feeling. There is in him a quiet under current, which we call his nature, which crosses, or is set against, the upper drift of his soul, and is sure sooner or later to make its greater power to be felt. It acts with a force, like that of gravity in the outer world, unceasing and self acting, overcoming in the end all that goes against it. On it depends steadfastness in any belief or unbelief: it is what St. John calls "continuance." He sees the action of it in those men who had troubled and then left the church. "*If*," he says, "*they had been of us they no doubt would have continued with us*." Their position as Christians had been strained and unnatural. They were not the kind of men to be Christians. Like Simon

Magus, of whom we are told that be believed the glad tidings and was baptized, their heart had never been right before God. Their new birth, as no doubt it was at first called, had been no true renewal of the spirit of their mind. The Apostle adds that their going out served the good end of making it manifest that "*they all were not of us.*" Or in other words, that the church, as it is *seen* at any hour, is not to be thought of as made up only of true believers.

The weight which St. John thus gives to the strong tide, or main drift, of each man's deeper nature, cannot be passed over; but the thought we give it must not be hasty, lest we be led by it into error, or at least into straits from which there seems to be no outgate. The error is, that since some acts of goodness may be wrought by one whose deeper nature is bad, and some acts of sin wrought by some whose deeper nature is good, therefore, since the deeper nature is everything, it really matters little what we do. To think this is to make an evil use of truth. We may be sure that if the deeper heart of a man be on the side of God, he will be quite unable to think lightly of sin. He may fall into a grievous sin, as King David did, but the end of it will not be carelessness, but a grief, a shame, a self loathing, which can be expressed by nothing short of the 51st Psalm, in which we see the deeper current reaching the surface and carrying all before it.

As for the unanswerable question, to which the Apostle here brings us, it is one which many have put to God, and surely not in vain, if it has been asked from the depths of a sorrowful hatred of oneself, "Why hast Thou made me thus?" To it no answer was ever made, unless indeed he who puts it feels it an answer to be reminded of the faithful trust he may well put in the justice and tender pity of God. Our small minds we may be sure could not understand His reason for making each man as he is; but if we know God as the Father of Jesus Christ, we can believe that He who is the Judge of all the earth will do right. And this trust, which He may well claim from us, is more noble than the knowledge of an archangel. Our sinful nature is indeed a body of death bound to us; but for it we cannot blame God, who has made sure our deliverance from it through Jesus Christ our Lord, if indeed we wish to be delivered.

Chap. II. v. 20.

And ye have an anointing from the Holy One, and ye know all things (or, *And ye all know*).

The word "*unction*" in the A.V. has been rightly changed by the revisers for the word "*anointing*." The former word carries to most readers no clear sense. It may even mislead, as it is so often used

to express nothing better than smooth fervour of manner, while the word "anointing" has a clear meaning, and points to much in the Old Testament which gives us understanding of its use here. It is likely that oil had its place in sacred ceremonial, because of some healing power it had, or was thought to have. In this some shadowing forth of the Holy Spirit, and of His work, may be seen. But it is more to the point to remember how under the Old Testament men of high office were anointed with oil. Kings were called the "Lord's anointed." David was in this way thrice set apart, and with the same meaning this rite had its place in the ordination of priests, and sometimes of prophets also. Christ is to us what kings, prophets, and priests were to the Jews. He is therefore the Anointed One---the Christ—set apart in this way to His most holy offices, anointed, but not with oil, that all might see that His anointing was of the Spirit, and that it was God Himself who anointed Him with the Holy Ghost and with power (Acts x. 38).

What we are told of this anointing, as fitting Christ for His great work, may well have a large place among our thoughts. But St. John is thinking of it only in so far as he wishes us to understand that the people of Christ partake with Him in this anointing. They too are, according to the measure of each, anointed by God with the Spirit; and each

one of them is thus set apart as a prophet, a priest, and a king. "He that hath anointed us," saith St. Paul, "is God" (2 Cor. 1. 27), and here St. John tells his children that they "*have an anointing from the Holy One.*"

It is this which makes true Christians, whatever their office may be, equal before God. Under the Old Testament, the guides and leaders of the people alone were anointed, but under the New Testament there is no inner and outer circle for those who belong to the church of Christ—all are kings, all prophets, all priests, all alike anointed.

Here St. John is speaking of Christians as prophets, that is, as men enlightened by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. As to how this enlightening is brought about by the Holy Spirit, we are warned by Christ Himself not to ask. It is by seeing, not the wind itself, but what it does, that we know that it blows; so also is the anointing of the Holy Spirit known. Here His work is to give safety from the false teaching of an antichrist. That these antichrists were in error was made clear, as St. John has said, by their going out from the Christian fold. But the word "*and*" at the beginning of this verse shows that the Apostle felt that, apart from any such outward sign, true Christians, anointed with the Holy Spirit, were able to know them for what they really were. "*Ye,*" he says, by virtue of this anointing, "*know all things,*" or rather (for this is

the better reading), "*ye all know*." In other words St. John is sure that there is no inner circle of Christians who alone "know." This spiritual anointing brings to every child of God such knowledge of Gospel truth as will enable him to escape from the snares of Antichrist. But the knowledge which may do this for him is not all of the same kind. What sort of knowledge then is it which the Apostle here means? Is it a revelation made by God, but not through the senses, of facts which could not have been otherwise known, such as those true of Christ before He was made flesh, or of the great miracle of His making?

While the Christian church was yet very young, knowledge was thus given to it. St. Paul tells the Galatians that much at least of what he knew and preached of truth came to him not through the teaching of man but by revelation of Jesus Christ Himself (Gal. I. 12), and he places knowledge, clearly of this kind, among the spiritual gifts by which the presence of the Holy Spirit in the churches was shown (1 Cor. XII. 8). By this gift, as well as by others of a like kind, the church was at first enriched. But we can see that about it dangers began to gather, and the time seems soon to have come when, as St. Paul foretold, it was done away (1 Cor. XIII. 8), and that, it would seem, before the Epistle was written. It was not then of this kind of knowledge that St. John is here

speaking. The knowledge he means is clearly of facts in the life of Christ already made known to the church, so far as words can bring out such truth. Verbal knowledge of what is true of Christ, such as is given at least in the three first Gospels, belonged alike to the antichrist and the true believers.

In what way then did the anointing of the Holy Spirit give to those true believers a knowledge so unlike that of the antichrists? Now we know how much our likings and dislikings, our prejudices and our passions, have to do with our views of almost any truth. We learn this from our own everyday life. As we can point the eye or a telescope away from what we do not wish to see, so can we turn our minds away from any truth that at the first glance displeases us, even if for no better reason than that we never saw it before, so that if it is set before us in words, and upheld by proofs, we can yet keep it from becoming to us a felt reality. Thus it is that a knowledge which is *about* a thing, but not *of* a thing, differs most widely from that gained by us, when our mind, impatient of the mere words which cover the truth they convey, pierces through them to the truth itself, which it makes its own, and thenceforth knows, not as remembered by it, but as ever seen before it. It is in this way that God is seen, and thus it is that while a vile person may know all about God that words can tell, it is only

the pure in heart that see Him; who, not turning from Him at the first glance of His purity, look, as it were, straight at Him, and with sympathy and worship take into their inmost soul the reality of His being and character.

This is none other than the truth which St. John has already set before us when he spoke of our being in the light, and there having fellowship with the Father, and with His Son, and with the Apostles. Sin is darkness, and the source of our mistakes in spiritual things; while from holiness, wrought in us by the Holy Spirit, comes knowledge of the true. Hence the value of the anointing spoken of here as saving from the error of the anti-christs. In this way it is that the Holy Spirit takes of the things of Christ and shows them to us. He does not put before us new facts in the life or death of Jesus. He, by giving us new hearts, takes from the understanding all that hindered its clear sight of the old truths, once given to the church by those who were from the beginning the eye-witnesses and ministers of the word.

CHAP. II. VV. 21-23.

I have not written unto you because ye know not the truth, but because ye know it, and because (or, *that*) *no lie is of the truth. Who is the liar but he that denieth that Jesus is the Christ? This is the antichrist, even he that denieth the Father and the Son. Whosoever denieth the Son, the same hath not the Father: he that confesseth the Son hath the Father also.*

It was because St. John knew that his children, through the anointing of the Holy Spirit, had already taken in all the knowledge they needed for the time, that he now goes on to say that he will not set before them any new truths; he will only ask them to use aright the truths they have already grasped. This they are to do by marking how the truth they have learned bears on the new teaching of these antichrists. "*No lie is of the truth.*" It cannot fit into it, or live with it. Therefore those who, through the anointing of the Holy One, are able to see spiritual truth, must be also able to see what is spiritual falsehood, even when it comes in the guise of truth.

There is one point taken for granted by St. John, which it is well to notice. It is, that the Christian has seen that the spiritual world is as real as the world of sense, and that therefore truth or falsehood

can be told about what is in it. It is not a world of opinions, but of facts, and therefore it cannot be made other than it is by the wishes, or hopes, or the fears of any man, though these, in so far as they are the same among all men, may justly be thought to point towards what is true of it. To be unable to feel that the spiritual world is a reality is the great want of those who are not anointed by the Holy Spirit. To the natural man, the things which belong to it are foolishness, and cannot be received by him, because they are spiritually discerned.[1] He can only turn the faculty whereby he might have grasped them to the base uses of fanciful superstition.

To this spiritual blindness is often added an utter deadness of feeling to so great a want. No weight is given to the question of the real and the true. There are those who, if they are pleased or interested, or probably the gainers, by a statement, or an argument, or a speculation, will take it up, and make it their own, without feeling that to do so is wrong, if they do not believe it. Such men cannot use the principle of St. John, that "*no lie is of the truth*." They do not perhaps say that there is no such thing as truth or fact in the spiritual world, but to them there really is no such thing. It belongs, then, to the Christian, to whom has been given the anointing of the Spirit, to have not only

[1] 1 Cor. II. 14.

a sense of the reality of spiritual things, but also so clear a view of them as to be able to see at once a spiritual lie—to see that among them there is no room for something which he is asked to believe is to be found there, and which therefore could never have been seen there by any one who was really in the light. It is an unreality, that which is not and cannot be, that is to say, "a lie."

St. John is writing with much feeling, under a sense of danger hanging over the church. An error so deadly is being taught that he calls it a lie, and the teacher of it a liar. We know that this error, taking many forms, was simply to deny that Jesus was the Son of God. This was and is denied by all Jews, and by many who are not Jews, on the ground that there is only one God, and not two or three Gods. But the danger feared by St. John did not arise in this shape. The error with which it was armed was to be feared, because it drew its strength from the rule for the detection of error, which the Apostle had just laid down. The false teachers were as ready as St. John to say "Ye know the truth," and "that no lie is of the truth." Ye know the truth of the majesty of God. He is "the King of kings, eternal, immortal, invisible, dwelling in light that is inaccessible: Him no man hath seen or can see." Such is God. But where is there a trace of majesty or glory, where of anything like God, in the humble life of that Jesus who was seen

and touched by men on earth? He suffered and died. He could not be God. Truth, known and acknowledged by all, shuts out as unthinkable such an idea.

What these false teachers thought Jesus to be; by what long series of beings, rising step by step to a high and still higher place, they or their disciples led up, as by an endless genealogy, from Jesus to God, it would be vain for us to ask. Their system was curiously subtle. All that we have to notice in it is that their reasoning was good, if that which they knew of God was all that was true of Him; but bad, and without force to all who had learnt the lesson, taught by St. John, that the highest glory, the real greatness of God, is seen, not in His power and majesty of state, but in His love and boundless pity for the wretched. If love be boundless we can see that there is no depth of lowliness, no stress of pain which may not be borne by it; nay, that it needs the utmost of them, if it is to be seen as boundless. The depth, then, of the humiliation of Jesus, so far from throwing doubt on His being the Son of God, belongs to, is the natural outcome of, all that is most glorious in His divinity.

It is thus clear that St. John's test of a truth, that it is at one with all other truth, while it may often answer a good end, must be used with care. That it may not lead us into error, we must be

able to give to each truth its proper rank, seeing that some truths are far greater than others, having as it were a kingly place, so that before them other truths must bow. Justice, truth, readiness to give, and power, all belong to God, but His giving must ever be under the sway of His justice and truth, and His power must have its aim and boundaries given it by all His other attributes. We must judge of our own doings on this principle. We may not please our generous feeling by giving to an object, however good, if by doing so we become unable to pay our just debts. We may not try to put in a good place our dearest friend, if we have already bound ourselves to get it, if we can, for another. We may not make a child happy by giving him what his brother has earned. We must be just and true at any cost. It is by forgetting this principle that we so often become unjust to God. No doubt we cannot always understand His dealings with men. No carefulness of thought can make His justice in many of them clear to us. Still, if we cannot see it, we may well believe in it. He cannot be unjust who, in order to be just in forgiving our sins, spared not His own Son. The fact of the humiliation and suffering of the Son of God is the master truth which shuts out as a lie, from our thought and feeling, all doubt, not only of the love, but also of the justice of God.

But clearly we cannot reach this most helpful

certainty unless we believe that Jesus is the Son of God; and that belief again must stand or fall with the view we take of what must go to make up our idea of God. The Antichrist was right when he held fast to the truth of the supreme majesty of God. That truth seemed to him to make it clearly untrue that the suffering and dying Jesus was divine. St. John and all the Apostles might teach that He was the Son of God. They might hold that this was a fact, and therefore outside of the region of the likely or the unlikely. But the fact of the supreme majesty of God was allowed by St. John also, and beside it this fact, as he would have it, could not stand. St. John's answer to them is, that their notion of wherein lay the greatness of God so marred all true idea of Him as to come to a real denial of Him. In denying the Son they also denied the Father; they had Him not; they had never grasped the true idea of God; and that because they had failed to see wherein lies the true glory and majesty of the Highest. They had looked up to Him as a king, but never as a Father.

It may be well here to notice another reason for denying the fact of the Divinity of Christ, which some have seen in the difficulty of understanding the manner of it. Since our Lord was on earth many forms of words have been used to set forth the person of Jesus, and His place in the Godhead. It is not easy to give a clear sense to some of these

forms. Many Christians do not know what the words of them are, and few ever try to have a clear understanding of any of them. It is enough, they think, to say them over, as a child his lesson. Are we then to say that most Christians are therefore ignorant of the great fact of the true Divinity of Jesus? If this be ignorance, the Bible certainly leaves us in it. It teaches us at one time that He is God, and at another that He is man, but nowhere tries to make clear to us how the greatest of all miracles was wrought, which made Him at once God and man; or how the Word became flesh, when the Son of God took to Himself a true body and a reasonable soul, thus passing from the state of God into that of man. We are simply led to think of Him now as God, and again to think of Him as man, but nowhere are we ever asked so to join these two ideas as that they shall, to our understanding, come together as one. The Bible is for the use of man, and it is one of the many proofs of its source in God, that, unlike books written upon it, it never sets the finite creature to a task that is beyond the power of his mind. A truth is to be prized, not because it gives us deep thoughts, but because we can use it for some good end in our spiritual life. It should have a high place with us only when it acts as a living power on our hearts and lives.

Tried by this test, what is then the value of the

truth of the Divinity of Jesus Christ? Now by some it is most highly prized because without it the theory of the atonement, made for us by Christ, would want one of its pillars. Others, with equal reason, uphold it, because a Being they can understand is thus set before them to be worshipped: but here by St. John because by Jesus, as the Son of God, the Father is made known to us. For it is not enough that the sacrifice for our sins should be the Son of God, and that, by His becoming flesh, a God who had seemed afar off should be brought nigh to us in a Being, truly Divine, yet intelligible, because in all things made like ourselves. St. John felt also, and strongly, that, without seeing God in Jesus, we could never reach the life-giving truth that God is our Father. Indeed we cannot see how by any means, short of the gift of His own Son, God could have made sure to any thinking and feeling man that He truly loved and cared for us sinful and helpless creatures. Our sense of justice can bear with the great sorrows of godly and righteous men in this world only when we remember that they too have sinned, and still need to be made better by chastisement; but if we had been asked to see in the pure and holy Jesus no more than a man, a mere creature like ourselves, made by a single word of power, then the sufferings of one, who knew no sin, would have roused us against the Sovereign of the universe, who could, for whatever end, bring into

being so perfect a soul, only that He might give it over to a sorrow it never deserved. A feeling very unlike this fills our heart when we know that this sinless Sufferer was the Son of God, and one with God, the object of His eternal love, whom nevertheless He spared not, but out of pity for us gave up, a willing Victim, to make sure of our good.

No doubt, all that is bound up in this truth is not clear to us. It has to do with the acts of One, the manner of whose being, and many of whose ways are past finding out. But the greatest fact in the spiritual world is thus set before us, in the only form in which it could touch our hearts. A just view is given us of Him who filleth eternity and immensity, the Almighty Ruler, so that instead of being afraid of Him, we can rejoice with a sense of peaceful safety in feeling ourselves everywhere wrapped in His presence, as in an atmosphere of love; and of such love as that St. John may well say that it alone gives us a true knowledge of what love really is. Thus it is that through the knowledge of the Divinity of our Lord our hearts are bound fast to God. Thus are thankfulness and love, in place of fear or thought of profit, given to us as urging to holiness, thus is every force brought to bear on us which can weaken sin, and foster in us all that is good, for thus, and only thus, is God seen to have towards us the heart of a loving Father. "*Confessing the Son we have the Father also.*" In

short, it is a great truth that "no man hath seen God at any time," and that it is the "Only Begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father," who has declared Him. We do not know the Father first, and then the Son through Him, knowing and confessing the Son, we "*have the Father also*." We do not make up our minds as to what is Divine, and then beholding Jesus say He is Divine. It is by seeing that Jesus is most high above all the earth, that we gain the true idea of the Divine—of God as love, and God as light. A man therefore must see for himself that Jesus is the Son of God, and if he sees this, having been led to adoring love to Him, as the Most High, and the Best, then the words, in which he tries to express what he has seen and felt, are of quite secondary consequence, in the sight of God at least, who sees, through and beyond both our words and our silence, what is in our minds and hearts. It is well indeed that God does this: for words, as we understand them, often, we know, express much more, but as often much less, than the real feelings of the man who uses them.

CHAP. II. VV. 24, 25.

As for you, let that abide in you which ye heard from the beginning. If that which ye heard from the beginning abide in you, ye also shall abide in the Son, and in the Father. And this is the promise which He promised us, even the life eternal.

St. John now turns to the faithful Christians, whom he sets apart from the Antichrists, as quite unlike them. "*As for you,*" he says, "*let that abide in you which ye heard from the beginning.*" St. John's subject has just been the Divine glory of Christ. He therefore seems here to call on his little children to keep the fact of it before their minds, as it had been taught them from the first.

There can be no doubt that if they thus cease not to confess the Son, they will be able to keep hold of the truth, that they are children of God, and that He is to them a loving Father. This is, as we have seen, one of the great truths which rests on the fact of the Divinity of our Lord. For, indeed, all spiritual truth has its centre in Him as the Son of God. All knowledge of what is real in the spiritual world, and not guessed at, can be reached only through Him, as God manifest in the flesh, who thus saves us from that ignorance of God which is spiritual death. But by saying this here, St. John

would be only repeating himself: and since the words "from the beginning" have been used already by him, not about the Divinity of Christ, but about the great law of love, it is likely that he is here speaking of that law, as if he said, If you let that great law—that old and yet new commandment—which you had from the beginning, abide in you, then you also shall abide in the Son and in the Father.

This sense of the words takes in the other also, but rises above it to the height of a larger truth, and it answers well to the main scope of St. John's thought. The false teachers, as we have seen, denied the Divinity of our Lord, because it took from the dignity of God to think of Him as suffering. They thought so, because they were full of the world's feeling that there is nothing higher or better than to escape all suffering, and to be so served as to need to do nothing for one's self or for others. Since then the Most High could do all He pleased, it was not to be thought that for any end He would take on Him the form of a servant, and humble Himself, and become obedient to death. They therefore held that Jesus could not be God. St. John's disciples, on the other hand, if they had learned the great commandment of love, as they had been taught it from the beginning, would see that the highest glory lay in helping rather than in being helped, in serving rather than in being

served, in forgetting rather than in minding self. The greatest man among them was he who sacrificed most, who bore most for the good of others; the best man he who loved his neighbour best. But above them all, in this scale of honour, rose supreme their Lord Jesus Christ, so very far the Highest and the Best that there could be none higher or better. In God there could be no greatness or majesty more lofty than His. They could form no higher idea of the Divine. The glory which they beheld in His lowliness was a glory as of the Only Begotten of the Father. The suffering Jesus was thus to them the fitting manifestation of God. His sacrifice of Himself that which became God, and His whole work, by reason of the love shown in it, a Divine work altogether worthy of God. Thus it was that they, rightly esteeming the Son, "*had the Father also*."

So would it always be with them, in spite of the Antichrist, the Apostle goes on to say, if they let that law of love abide in them. For if they lost hold of it, they would lose the ground on which rested their real belief in the Divinity of Christ. Not, perhaps, that they would come to deny in words that He is God, but they would cease to feel that He is God. For any belief in the Divinity of Christ, that is worthy of the name, turns not on the form of words we use, but on our clear sense of the supreme glory of His character. Whatever that

may be which a man calls God, his real God is that which to him is highest and best and most glorious. If the power which God possesses be His highest attribute, then were the Antichrists right in holding that Jesus could not be His Son, nor could His children be those who, destitute, afflicted, tormented, followed Jesus on earth. But if God be of boundless love, then Jesus, suffering for our sins on the cross, is surely His Son, and those are clearly His children who are ready to set the Father highest in their hearts as Christ did, and to rejoice in the same kind of glory which satisfied Him when He saw of the travail of His soul.

But if it is to be so with us, that law of love, which was from the beginning, must "*abide*" in us. It is not enough to have a glimpse of its worth. The words here used seem to mean that it will abide in us, if we will let it. We must therefore not cast it out. We all know what is meant by an abiding impression. The greater number of the things, which at first deeply move us, fade quickly from our memory and feeling. Were it otherwise, did each impression made on our minds stay there with all its first strength, we could not bear to live. It is thus a law of our nature that impressions, even the deepest, sooner or later pass away. It is well for us that it is so; for more hopelessly crowded with all confusion, than a house which no guest ever left, would our minds be, if every conviction and feeling

that entered them kept for ever their first place. Some, however, of these convictions and feelings should never leave us, and would never leave us, if we let them stay. They are the rightful owners of the house within us; nay, in a sense it was for the sake of finding a proper dwelling-place for some of them that we were at first created. Above all others, should this law of love ever abide with us, and as a law rule us, and it will abide if we do not cast it out, weary of the work to which it sets us; for our souls made in the image of God are its proper seat.

It is often irksome for us to know that all of duty that this law laid on Christ it will ever lay on us. It seems to us sometimes that we weary of its endless claims. But be it remembered that to deny one of these is simply to sin, and that if we drive that law from our hearts, we banish with it all real knowledge of the heart of God our Father, and all peace in believing, and in time of trial we shall no more be able quietly to hope and wait for His salvation. All good comes to us, and all goes, with the coming or going within us of this Godlike love.

The verse which follows, in which St. John speaks of the promise of eternal life made to us by God, seems at first sight to come in here awkwardly and out of place. But if we think of it, we may see more than one reason for its following what St. John has been just saying. The word "*abide*" may have led him to bring it in. For, to the Apostle's mind,

the law of love is also the law of life, and with him to abide in love is to abide in life. To make sure of this abiding, to watch over this Godlike love so as to keep it from being driven from our hearts by the selfishness which is ever striving to reign there, is the great struggle of the Christian's life. In it he needs to be upheld, and this St. John does for him, by putting him in mind of the promise of God to keep up in him for evermore the spiritual life, which is his from the abiding in him of the law of love.

St. John may also have felt that having set forth, as above all things good, that the believer should abide in the Son, and in the Father, it might be said that no man could well so abide and keep hold of all that goes along with such abiding, in the face of many of God's dealings with him. For the Christian life is often very full of sorrow. Sometimes there is nothing in it like the peace and safety which surely belong to one who abideth in God, and under the shadow of His wings. But, answers the Apostle, God hath never said to His children that they are to make their way and be happy here after the fashion of the world's well-being. The promise which He hath made them is of a spiritual life, which, once given, never ends, and which is nothing else, as our Lord tells us, but to know the true God and Jesus Christ whom He hath sent, that is, as we have seen, to know God as the Father, and Jesus Christ as His Son. That, then, which the love of

the Father bestows on His children here, is that best and most noble life, which, after it has been trained into strength here on earth, shall find an eternity before it, in which, with perfectness of joy, it shall use its full-grown powers. Such a promise St. John thinks may well save the troubled believer from his doubts.

St. John had perhaps still another reason for bringing in this verse where we find it. He had been speaking of many things which are very high; too high we, and he also, may feel for us who are living out so fast our short and broken life here on earth. This fellowship with God and with His Son, this living in the light, this knowing all things, this full sense of having a Father in God, all this is good, —very good; but so far as this world goes, and what we have seen in it, this is little better than a dream of perfection. We waken from it to the hard realities of darkness and distance. What is best in us is that we have not ceased to struggle upwards; but as to such heights as these, they are indeed far above us. True, saith St. John, it is so with all. But be of good cheer; our souls are not now dead as they once were. God hath given us life, and with it the promise of an eternity, in which all that is dark shall be made clear, and in which that life, which now we know only as a seed starting into growth, shall be revealed in each one of us with a glory like that of the life of Christ Himself.

CHAP. II. VV. 26, 27.

These things have I written unto you concerning them that would lead you astray. And as for you, the anointing which ye received of Him abideth in you, and ye need not that any one teach you: but as His anointing teacheth you concerning all things, and is true (or, *so it is true*) *and is no lie, and even as it taught you, ye abide in Him.*

St. John now sums up all that, since v. 18th, he has said of the false teachers. His children are in peril, but he has warned them. They now know the real character of the men, who, with all their seeming awe of God, were not guiding them to higher truth, but leading them astray. Yet surely this warning was not needed, since they had within themselves a sure source of safety. These men had risen up to teach them, but, in spiritual things at least, they needed no teaching from any man, not even from an Apostle. On all such points they had an inward Teacher, if they only knew it, far better than man. They had, as he has told them in v. 20, an anointing from Christ, by virtue of which they know the truth.

By this anointing the Apostle meant, as we have seen, the work of the Holy Spirit, and the chief point in this passage is that it tells us of that work

that it abides. It may well be that those to whom the Apostle was writing had lost sight of the works of the Holy Spirit, which were the best and most lasting. The Apostle Paul had to warn the Corinthian church against a like forgetfulness. The coming of the Holy Spirit to the church, when the Apostles first began to teach, was marked by certain strange gifts, bestowed through the laying on of their hands. But when this Epistle was written, these gifts, as St. Paul had foretold, seem to have all but ceased: and thus it might be thought that the anointing of the Spirit had ceased with them. Nay, saith St. John, it "*abideth*" with those to whom it had been given, and it is still bestowed. In this, as in all else, God abideth faithful. His Holy Spirit worketh now in another way, which can be clearly marked, if not so readily seen. "It *teacheth you concerning all things,*" and therefore ye "*need not that any one teach you.*"

St. John has already said this in v. 20, so that we need not here dwell on it at any length. It may, however, be well to remember that among the spiritual gifts, which were no longer bestowed on the church, if indeed such a gift ever was bestowed. was the knowledge of facts, not before known, about Christ. It is therefore not of this gift that St. John is here speaking. His children already know Christian truth, as far as words can give it. The knowledge then of which he here speaks is that higher

kind which belongs to the man who, breaking through the form of words in which, as in a husk or shell, truth is wrapped up, grasps the truth itself, makes it his own, holds it, feeds his soul upon it, so that it becomes part of him who has it, as a living force, for evermore giving colour and shape to his feelings and works. The man who through the anointing of the Holy Spirit, in this higher sense, is aware of what has been made known of Jesus Christ, needs not to be taught in spiritual truth. He has already the means of knowing all of it that is good for him to know. Just as in our daily life, if we have long had a friend, whose character we can look into with understanding and fellow feeling, we know at once what is true, or cannot be true, of him, and can say without doubt what at any time, or anywhere, he will do or feel: so is it with the man who, not through words, but through the anointing of the Holy Spirit knows God. Even we, whose anointing is but in part, who are far indeed from being altogether righteous—even we can say boldly of some things that Christ would do them, or would not do them. It is by this insight that, if we be Christians, we guide ourselves in many acts of our life, for which we can find no written law. Christ would not do this, we say, and therefore we must not do it.

But if this be true, whence comes it that real Christians are often so unlike each other in many

things they think and do? Now it should ever be noted that this want of real likeness is not so great as it often seems to be. We tend to dwell on the points in which we are unlike other Christians, rather than on those about which we are quite at one with them, and, with much heat of spirit, to make much of these differences. If we thought of those Gospel truths as most valuable, which did most to mould the life and character, we should find that all Christian churches and men are really at one on all the facts which most closely touch Christ and God. The disagreements are not so much about the great facts of the Gospel, as about how these are, and why these are—not so much about Christian duties, as about the best way of doing them: and many of them have to do with questions which the Bible, by saying nothing about them, sets aside as of no profit. Divisions among us arise clearly from this, that while every true Christian is under the teaching of the Holy Spirit, there is no Christian on earth who has left himself wholly to that teaching. There is some region in the soul of each which, unknown it may be to him, is not yet enlightened, and that region is not quite the same in any. Something belonging to the old sinful nature, some personal or class prejudice, clearly gives colour or form to the religion and life of every man. So that it may be said that as there are no two men in the world who in face are quite alike, so are there no two

men in whom a religious word or phrase (or indeed any word or phrase) awakens quite the same set of ideas; so that differences or agreements in words should not be held as always bringing out either wide discord or close harmony of thought. A man's creed is not always, as we know, the symbol of what he believes. He is often worse than his creed, but also as often perhaps better than his creed. He may, through habit or prejudice, hold that certain words bring out what he thinks to be true, while his real beliefs, though he does not know it, rise above, or sink below, the usual sense of these words. So that while there may be a real discord between those who seem to hold the same faith, there may be a real unity between those who never doubt that in what they believe they are far apart. Indeed it is very clear that if we could range the members of various churches or sects by their real affinities, we should find that in each church there were many who ought rightly to be enrolled in other churches, and in each of these some who might justly be taken back in their place. More pleasing, than to mark such disarray, it is to learn that a truly Christian life is to be found, not in one church only, or joined to one form of worship. The longings and strivings of the Christian soul are much the same under forms and symbols the most various. And under strange differences of phrase the same ideas meet us in all Christian books. Surely it is

good to believe this; it gladdens the heart, and helps us towards charity.

The Apostle now goes on to say that this anointing "*is true and is not a lie,*" or, in other words, that the Spirit of Christ is the Spirit of truth, and that therefore there can be no change in His teaching. That which He once taught will not give the lie to that which He at any time teaches. The Gospel has always been the same. Its truths may be better seen by us than they once were. Our view of these may be enlarged, our sense of the place of each of them, in the scale of value, may be changed, but we shall never have to give up one of them as not true. What under the teaching of the Holy Spirit, if indeed it was His teaching, we once believed as true, is still true, and ever must be true. He, if we open our minds to Him, will enable us to widen our knowledge of spiritual things, to put away the weak and the childish, to go on from the Old Testament to the New, to see more than one side of truth, and to rejoice in its beauty, as beheld from new points of view. Changes in our lives, with what they bring of new feelings and thoughts, will, under the teaching of the Spirit, bring out more and still more of the meaning and value of all we have been told of Jesus Christ, and thus enable us, with a growing understanding of Him, to adore and to abide in Him: to live under the power of His presence and character, and thus to be shaped

more truly in His image; until we come at last to be wholly like Him, and then to see Him as He is.

Meanwhile we should hope to find our views of Divine truth enlarging themselves, and therefore never think that some hitherto unseen form of it cannot be true, inasmuch as it is new. We often make some great and even startling change in our views of things around us when we look at them on more than one side. A stretch of landscape seems not the same, but quite another, when we look at it from more than one point. It is so also with the domain of truth. A mountain so changes its shape, as we climb from the base towards the top of it, that we can scarce think it to be all the time the same great solid mass. And it is so with the hill of Heavenly Truth. It so shifts many of its forms, as we labour up it, that when we look round, from as near God's point of view as we can reach, we can scarce believe that this really is what we had been wont to see from our native valley beneath. Much more would we feel this if, having gained the wings and the eye of an eagle, we were soaring miles nearer the sun. How strangely unlike to our old selves do we seem, when we leave the accustomed standpoint of our conscious responsibility, and look at ourselves from the firm height of God's sovereignty. So is it, as we pass from point to point of our lives, that the aspect and proportions of many truths come to be not what they once were, while

the truths themselves remain as they have ever been. We may indeed be brought for a time to a stand by many things which we come to see, but we know that though we cannot tell how some things are, we need not therefore set bounds to what may be in a universe which is filled with the presence of the Infinite, and in which our small minds can take in very little of the vastness around us. We are but as insects creeping over a page, so large that it takes us a lifetime of travel to make out a single letter of the words written upon it. "Canst thou by searching find out God?" He indeed reveals Himself, but in "diverse portions," be it remembered, as well as in "diverse manners."

Chap. II. vv. 28, 29.

And now, my little children, abide in Him; that, if He shall be manifested, we may have boldness, and not be ashamed before Him at His coming. If ye know that He is righteous, ye know that every one also that doeth righteousness is begotten of Him.

The last verse gave us a promise of our abiding: this verse commands us to abide. It is one of the cases in which we find a gift becoming a duty, which the Christian is urged to undertake. The anointing carries with it abiding in Christ, therefore "*Abide in Him.*" For this close union cannot be, unless

we take part in it. If Christ holds our hand, we also must hold His. St. John lays this duty on us with much kindness. "*Little children,*" he says, "*abide in Christ.*" Keep close to Him. Try to feel every hour that He is with you, around you, nay, in you, seeing you, knowing you, feeling about you, and having certain judgments upon you. He is indeed thus near, live then "as seeing Him who is invisible." This will cheer and strengthen you, and make your lives holy. It will also make your lives true, for that is a false life, which does not reckon with all that really touches it.

These are some of the reasons why we should strive to abide in Christ. There are many more, among which St. John fixes on one, which has to do with the much hoped-for second coming of Christ. Christ can now be seen only with the eye of faith. But it is not always to be so. Every eye is one day to see Him. In some way, it is to be made sure to every man that Christ is there before him. St. John does not say by what means this is to be brought about; by what signs Christ is to force on men, even the most unwilling, the fact that He,—the Being before them,—is Jesus Christ, the Son of God. Unless there be a direct dealing with the inner man, in a way of which we know nothing, it is not easy to think of any outward signs of this strong enough to cope with the instructed ingenuity of a hostile unbelief. A Being in human form,

coming on clouds, and served by a retinue however glorious in the brightness of its shining, is not thereby proved, beyond all doubt, to be the Supreme Being, the Highest and the Best. For we do not know, and have no means of knowing, how many beings, or of what kind, or in what guise, may be in the universe, in some way able to visit the earth. Besides, Christ Himself could not, in a state of triumphant exaltation, give proofs of His possessing that self-sacrificing love, which marked Him out as the Only Begotten of the Father, and as the Highest in that moral universe, of which that of matter is the passing symbol. Clothed in the brightness of a glorified body, He might force on men a feigned subjection, by using the means He refused to touch when tempted in the wilderness: but never could He thus gain that love, that trust, that adoration, that devotion, which He made His own for ever, when He lived beside us that life of humiliation, and suffered for us that death of shame on the cross.

St. John however has no doubt of this coming, for the word "*if*," he uses here, has little more than the force of "*when*" and means that the time of it was not known. As for us, we may not then be alive and remaining. But St. John knows that, at their death, Christ will surely fulfil the promise He makes to all believers, to come and "receive them unto Himself";[1] and that afterwards will follow

[1] John XIV. 3.

the day in which each man will stand before Him, to give in his true account, and be judged according to that he had done. If then any of them should be found among those, who, having once known Christ, had failed to abide in Him, not caring to be near Him, then what shame,—then what shrinking back from Him, and the reproach of His look, as of a slighted friend, such as Peter saw in the court of the High Priest! Instead of drawing near to be filled with the joy that is theirs, in that day, who have been faithful to Him. This is surely a strong motive why we should strive to abide in Christ.

But, one may say, I have striven, but how can I be sure that I have really been able to abide in Christ? Now we have been told that we are abiding in Him if we have the anointing of the Spirit, and we have that if we are the children of God. We cannot however try ourselves by either of these tests without risk of error. The only safe test, which we can really use, is found in the fact that they who are the children of God will be like their Father in the things they do. "*Every one*," saith St. John, "*that doeth righteousness is begotten of Him*."

The Apostle is not about to tell them anything new about God. "*Ye know*," he says, ye cannot but know already, that "*He is righteous*." Let it be marked that it is God Himself who is thus spoken of, not His law, or His acts, but Himself. Righteousness was not created by God. "Thy

righteousness," saith the Psalmist, "is an everlasting righteousness, and Thy law is the truth." The sharp line between right and wrong is eternal and unchangeable, and the law of God, as we have seen, may therefore be looked on, not merely as resting on His authority and power, but as a loving and most helpful statement, made to us by Him, of what is and must be, not only on earth, but throughout the universe, and which therefore even He can never change, or make less binding, to please any of His children. He loves them, there is nothing of good that He will withhold from them, but this He cannot do for them; they must be holy, even as their Father which is in Heaven is holy. If, then, they know that He is righteous, they know, or ought to know, that he only who doeth righteousness is born of Him.

The word "*doeth*" is to be marked here. The proof of our birth from God is to be sought, not in feeling or sentiment, not in what we have done or are going to do, still less in what we imagine ourselves as doing, somewhere or at some time, but what we are doing, and going on to do, in great things and in small, in the place where we now are.

We have taken the Apostle as telling us that every one that is born of God doeth righteousness; and this sense is included in his words. But he says much more than this, for his words are that

"*Every one that doeth righteousness is born of God.*"

There is here, at first sight, so great a breadth of view that we are tempted to ask if St. John really meant what he says. Is it the case that every one that doeth righteousness is a child of God? There have been, and there are, many righteous people who are not Christians. Did St. John look on them, simply because they wrought righteousness, as begotten of God? To answer this question, we must bethink ourselves of what St. John means by "*Righteousness.*" As we are wont to use the word, it means no more than the doing of that which is strictly just and honest, the giving to every man what in equity he has a right to claim, the keeping in short carefully on the narrow line which separates the selfish from the unselfish. St. Paul uses the word in this sense when he sets the righteous man over against the good man.[1] But it is clear that St. John did not thus narrow its meaning. With him righteousness is more than justice and honesty—more than not loving ourselves better than our neighbours. The righteous man is he who, in principle and feeling and act, allows every one of the claims which one being has on another. It is best seen in God, as revealed in Jesus Christ the Righteous. Sinful man had in God no plea founded on justice: our only claim was our misery and help-

[1] Rom. v. 7.

lessness; and it was this claim which God in His sublime righteousness acknowledged, when He sent His Son to die for us; and it is a righteousness like this which is to be sought for in the life and character of every child of God.

We may believe that when St. John wrote this Epistle he knew of none but true believers in Christ who did work righteousness, in his sense of the word. The rights of pure equity were not denied, but those of misery, and suffering, and sin, and helplessness, to look for sacrifices on the part of any who could lighten them, had never been clearly seen by the ancients, whether Jewish or heathen. Pity had often been felt, and acted upon, but the great idea of God's righteousness came into the world with Jesus Christ, and His followers were the first to see in it, not the outcome of a rare feeling, but a principle to be always carried out as a duty. It is therefore likely that, when this Epistle was written, every one who lived a righteous life was a Christian, since no one else in the world was, or tried to be, righteous in the higher sense of the word.

But it is not so now. Christianity has so leavened the world—Christ, wherever He has been truly made known, has become so clearly the "Saviour of all men"[1] from some of their old evils, that there have come to be many—some of them well-known—who

[1] 1 Tim. IV. 10.

do not think they believe the Gospel as we do, who nevertheless are so nobly ruled by the power over them of this highest righteousness, that their doing of it comes near, nay, sometimes seems to reach the height to which any Christian has risen. Are we to say of these men, who stand out clearly as doers of righteousness, that St. John would have looked on them as begotten of God? The answer to this question surely turns on another question, namely—Does faith in any one, or in any thing, need that he who has it should know and feel that he has it? Or, to put it otherwise, Is a believer not a believer if he thinks that he is not believing?

Now, it is not easy for any one to know clearly what the real state of his mind is about anything. We see often that many, who think they believe in Christ, do not really believe in Him. They show their unbelief by their lives; may it not be then that some, who think that they do not believe in Christ, really do believe in Him, showing their belief by their lives? If there be those, who shall draw near the very judgment seat of Christ with boldness, unenlightened even by what death had showed them of their real state, thinking that they had done much work for Him on earth, who yet shall be banished from Him as "workers of iniquity,"[1] may there not be some doers of righteousness, who, though they had never seen or

[1] Matt. VII. 21-23.

acknowledged Christ on earth, will yet be set on His right hand, and welcomed by Him, as having in His Spirit, if not in His name, befriended some of the least of His brethren?

This question our Lord's own words certainly do not forbid us to ask, but it is well for us that we have not to do more than ask the question. It is not our part to pass judgment on the hidden things of the heart. But it is not too much to say, that no man can have heard the reasons often given by unbelievers for doubting some Gospel truths, without seeing that these largely rest on an utterly mistaken idea of what Gospel truth really is, and that these men, or some of them, if before their minds had set and hardened in the forms of doubt, had known what Jesus Christ really was and taught, they would have welcomed Him, as coming up to more than their idea of the Highest and the Best. One is struck by the righteousness and worthy aims of some of the books and lives of men quite outside of any church. We know that fellow feeling with a true Christ cannot but lead to a denial of a false Christ, and it would seem to have been too often a false Christ who was set forth to some of those men by those who stood out before them as holding the key of spiritual knowledge. The Jews who, taught by Scribes and Pharisees, rejected their kind of religion, showed themselves probably to be better men than their teachers; and if it was by those who

sat in Moses' seat that the Old Testament was so dealt with as to become incredible, and its yoke unbearable, it is equally true that nowhere has Christianity been more sadly defaced than in the house of some who gave themselves out as its best friends. The antichrists of St. John's day were in the visible church when they set forth a false Christ; and it has often been so, not only with the Christ of the dark ages, but with Him as set forth by some who are understood to be of the truth. Faith in the idea of the true Christ must often have led to unbelief in the image held up by human authority as the Christ of the Gospel, and that by the very men in whom that righteousness, which they had really learned from Christ, has become the aim of a life-long pursuit.

We are taught by the Apostle Paul that it is "with the heart man believeth unto righteousness," and thus there may be a clinging to, an adoring sympathy of the heart, with an idea which is the true one of Christ, while, for that very reason, there is a shrinking back from an object, called Christ, which is not He. As in other lands one may see rude crucifixes set up, which must be utterly unlike Christ, so there have been times and places, and these perhaps not all in other lands, where the strongest proof of faith in the true Christ is the rejection of the Christ there set forth. There were surely some in the camp of Israel, when Aaron set

up the golden calf, and said, "These be thy gods, O Israel," who steadfastly refused to take as theirs such a God, even at his hands. They would be branded, by him and his, as unbelievers, yet these were the true worshippers of Jehovah. So may there be cases even still, in which a man by saying, I am not a Christian, proves himself to be a Christian indeed. How great the joy of such a man, when he leaves a world in which he has all his life been baffled by a false Christ, to see that his ideal, in which he had been abiding, was indeed the true and living Christ. Can we venture to deny that such a man, as a child of God, had received the Holy Ghost as well as we. He lost much, and did wrong, in taking the report of men, who only *seemed* trustworthy, as to what the Gospel was, instead of going to the Gospel itself. But his wrongdoing is not more heinous than much of the same kind, into which we doubtless, through prejudice or sloth, are ourselves falling. For who of us can venture to say that, without any prejudice, and with unwearied care, we have searched out for ourselves the truth of all we believe, or the untruth of all that we reject as false. Besides we cannot think that God would drive, from a place beside Himself, the man whose righteous heart was at one with His own, in that which is His highest glory—some Melchisedec, possibly quite outside of all visible churches, to whom a Christian Abraham might well

give tithes of all. A man, one with Christ, though he knew it not, whose fellowship with God must have been reached not otherwise than by the teaching of the Holy Spirit, who, giving to all men "severally as He will," had, by a short, straight path, brought him to the very point to which all that is found in the Gospel is meant to raise the believer in it.

May we not then say with St. John, taking his words as they stand, that not only when he wrote but alway, it is true that, "*every one that doeth righteousness is begotten of God,*" or with St. Peter, who was not far from the same truth when in the house of Cornelius he said, that "every one that feareth God and doeth righteousness is accepted of Him"? May we not at least hold, that if we are used to place among Christians those who in word agree with what Christ taught, even if they show little or none of the love to others which belongs to true righteousness, we may think not less clearly Christian the man who is at one in charity with the mind which was in Christ Jesus, even though he be not able honestly to take in all that we hold to be true about Him? It is surely a mistake to make an intellectual test of a man's Christianity the only one of any worth, especially since we are told that the man "*who saith he knows God and keepeth not His commandments is a liar,*" however large and clear, as far as words go, his knowledge may be.

Surely conduct is of greater worth than opinion. Surely the heart goes further than the brain to make a man what he really is.

Passing, however, from this, let us ever remember, as a truth that touches ourselves very nearly, that no man is a child of God who does not bear the seal of likeness to God as the proof of his birth from Him. The Apostle John was a man full of knowledge, but having learned much of the danger of resting on mere acquaintance with truth, he will have us test all of it, which we seem to have reached, by asking how far does it help us towards a Godlike righteousness.

Chap. III. v. 1.

Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called children of God: and such we are. For this cause the world knoweth us not, because it knew Him not.

If we are to make any helpful use of that test of a Godlike righteousness which St. John has given us, we must be very sure that we know what righteousness is. If we take it as nothing more than justice, it will fail as a test of our kinship with God, for in all ages, and in all lands, justice has been wrought and praised, if for no other reason than that without it men could not dwell together. Righteousness, as we have seen, is all of conduct,

and feeling, and principle that lies on the right side of the line drawn between the selfish and the unselfish, or, as the Apostle puts it, between love and hate. On the line itself is justice, holding an equal balance between a man and his neighbour, calling for no sacrifice on either side, but only a giving and taking of equal values. On the one side of the line is love, giving more or less, but asking nothing back for what is given. On the other side is hate, taking more or less, but giving nothing back for what is taken. Righteousness begins at this line, but at a little way from it, it comes to be called love. Unrighteousness or iniquity begins on the other side of the line, but when at some distance from it, it gets the name of hate. Love, then, and righteousness are, in St. John's sense of the words, though not in ours, one and the same. No line can be drawn between them, they run into each other. But the love of which this is true, is so unlike what men are wont to call love, that the Apostle wishes us clearly to understand that it is of a rare kind, called *the love of God,* and that it stretches, much further than any other love, away from the narrow line of mere justice. God does not bargain, He gives; and to the freeness of His giving there are no bounds, save those set by the sharp drawn line of justice.

Since then all God's children are to be filled with a love like His, they must know well what kind of

love it is. This is the more needful, because we are always ready to think that this love is the same as liking or fondness, and this is the very mistake against which St. John wishes to guard us. We cannot like or be fond of people as a duty, but we are bound to love them. To understand this, consider, saith the Apostle, the love of God to us. Look long at it, behold it, think of the manner of it, for it is that kind of love and no other which should be ours, if we are the children of God. It is the great attribute of God; but it is not to be His alone, and therefore St. John speaks of it, not as shown to us, or felt towards us, but as bestowed upon us, or imparted to us. As the nature of a parent is found in his offspring, so God makes us partakers of His nature, if we are indeed begotten of Him. Behold then, saith the Apostle, look well at the manner of this love, thus bestowed on you, remembering that you, if indeed you have it as your own, hold not only a legal, but a real and actual right, to be called the children of God. You are by adoption His sons, but when His love becomes yours, you then are His children in fact, and can be known as such. The best good which we get from our new birth is our likeness to our Father in heaven. To be a child of God thus becomes no empty title, it is a name fittingly given to those who bear the stamp of His image.

This is a truth which ought to have from us much

thought. God's love to us, as wilful sinners, was not a love of liking or fondness, but of sublime righteousness, and a like righteousness will be wrought in each of us up to our measure, if we be indeed His children.

The R.V. adds on good grounds the words "*and such we are*." We as Christians are nothing less than this—children of God—bearing His image, which is seen chiefly in our loving others as He loved us.

But is this true of us? Do any of us love others as God loved us? Have we any such love to those who are to us what we were to God?—unlike us, distasteful to us, people who have treated us ill, and, as far as they could, hurt us. Do we try to do good to such people, even at the cost of sacrifice? There is some comfort in knowing that the true reading is not "*sons of God*" but "*children of God*." The Christian, when he has reached the full height of the perfect man in Christ Jesus, will fully resemble his Heavenly Father, but here he is but a child, a little one. "We have not attained, neither are we perfect." "It never was manifested on earth what we shall be." The child is not the man, but, if he has life, he will grow up towards a true likeness to Him who is the express image of God. Meanwhile it is clearly our part to see that we are growing in the grace of loving others as God loved us.

Thus then it is with the Christian and God. But on the other side is the world. How does he stand to it? The Apostle thinks, we can see, that it is not unlikely that a child of God, who knows little of mankind, and is hopeful, may fancy that by showing a Godlike love to others, he may draw the world over to the side of God. If he finds that he fails in this, must not the fault be with him? Nay, saith St. John. It is not because you are not as like Christ as you wish to be, but because of such likeness to Him as you have, that the world will not acknowledge you as a child of God. In proportion as God has bestowed on you the grace of loving others as He loved you, do you become strange to the world, it "*knoweth you not.*"

It is not needful to go over again what has already been said (Chap. II. v. 15) of the world, as St. John uses the word, or to show again that what marks it off from the true church of Christ is not to be found in things merely outward and formal. The tares and the wheat grow together. The world is largely mixed with the visible church of Christ, and it may well be believed that known to God there are many, who seem to us of the world, who have not bowed the knee to its idols.[1] For, indeed, that which keeps really apart the world and the true church of Christ is just Godlike love. The man, though he may have a high place in the visible

[1] Rom. XI. 4.

church, who has none of that love, cannot understand or know those who have it. To know a character there must be in us that likeness to it, which is the only source of fellow-feeling. Those only who have in them some of the love, which His true children inherit from God their Father, can know what God's love to us has been and is. "Wonder not then if the world hate you," saith our Lord, "ye know it hated Me before it hated you."[1] Or as it is here, "*For this cause the world knoweth us not, because it knew Him not.*" The best and highest love was in Christ, as the chief proof of His being the Son of God, and the world, not being able to see from it that He was the Lord of glory, crucified Him. And as it was with the Master, so must it be with the servant; as with a Father, so with His children. Hence the strange words of Christ, to which we would do well to take heed. "Blessed are ye when men shall hate you, and when they shall separate you from their company, and reproach you, and cast out your name as evil,"[2] and "woe unto you, when all men shall speak well of you." A cause has one mark at least of being a good one when the world angrily, or sneeringly, tries to put it down. The life, we may fear, has something wrong in it, which all the world greatly praises.

We have thus seen that St. John here calls on

[1] John XV. 18. [2] Luke VI. 22-29.

us to behold the manner of God's love to us, and not the greatness of it. But surely in nothing is this greatness more strikingly shown, than in His imparting this love to us. What greater love can there be than to make us like Himself, by enabling us to love others as He loved us? Thus making us truly His children, who at first were found by Him so unworthy, so unfriendly, so far from Him and righteousness.

Chap. III. vv. 2, 3.

Beloved, now are we children of God, and it is not yet made manifest what we shall be. We know that, if He (or rather, *it*) *shall be manifested, we shall be like Him: for we shall see Him even as He is. And every one that hath this hope set on Him purifieth himself, even as He is pure.*

The Apostle has just said that all Christians are the children of God. Here he adds that they are *now* His children.

When we think of God, and then of ourselves, and reach some true sense of how far we are from Him, and of what it is for such as we are to be lifted up to a place beside Him as our Father, we feel that this cannot well be. The more true our thought of ourselves, the more unlikely does such honour seem. The more we know and understand

Christ, the further do we see ourselves to be from what we might have been: so far indeed that we feel that a pure spirit would need to look at us very closely to see anything more Godlike in us than in those who are of the world. Besides, we carry on our front no token of our being dear to One who is almighty. Christians are not always laden with the gifts which love is glad to bestow. They are not free from pain, and sorrow, and death. There is no marked outward sign that God cares for them, as a Father would surely care for his children. To the world outside of us, and to the world which still has its large place within us, this sonship seems a very empty title, for in nothing do we seem to be lifted up on high. But by the world the glory of the Only Begotten Son of God was never seen. Everywhere and always, while He was on earth, He carried with Him the truest tokens of His Divine Sonship. His love, His patience, His perfect obedience, His fulness of grace and truth, had in the eyes of men no beauty. He was a man of sorrows, therefore they said, "God has forsaken Him, persecute and take Him."[1] There were a few who felt otherwise, who beheld in Him, in whom men saw no form nor comeliness, "a glory as of the Only Begotten of the Father."

With them we are at one. We also see that to us all other evidence of the Divine Sonship of Christ

[1] Ps. LXXI. 11.

would be weak, without the proof given of it by the perfect righteousness of His life, and that a like token of our being God's children should be found in us also. But it is hard to find it. We are indeed wanting in meekness, and patience, and Godlike love. These graces are feeble in the best of us, while our disgraces—our vanity, our selfishness are strong. Even in our religion, when we are thinking ourselves nearest the mind of Christ, there is very little that is worthy of Him. We are like children playing in the market-place, mimicking the things done by men, making believe that rows of stones make a house, and that sand and brick dust are lifegiving food. We satisfy ourselves with words, in place of truths, with motions of the body, instead of emotions of the soul. St. John clearly knew that something of the sort was true even in his day, and yet he says, "*Now,*" in this life, with all our shortcomings, "*we are the children of God.*"

He again uses here the word "*children.*" St. Paul uses the word "sons" to set forth the place we legally hold in the sight of God, when He has adopted us.[1] St. John's word, as we have just seen, brings out our real state, as those who have in them the life of God, but who are far from having reached the stature of the perfect man. In the child there are the makings of a man, yet in him there cannot be seen more than the hints of what the man will

[1] Gal. IV. 5.

be. Hence it is that St. John says that "*it is not yet made manifest what we shall be.*" Never by any church, never by any body of Christians, never by the life on earth of any saint, not by anything we have known here of righteousness, not by what any of us have been in our best hours, has it been made manifest what we shall be. As with a garden in winter, nothing we see in it tells us what it will be when the spring winds have loosened the frost, only we know that there is life beneath the snow, and that one day that life will show itself in leaves and blossoms and fruit. So with the believer. He will one day have a part in that glorious "revealing of the sons of God" for which creation is waiting.[1] Meanwhile his spiritual life, like that of a plant safe all the winter in the root of it, is hid with Christ in God. More than this we cannot say of ourselves.

St. Paul, speaking of this glorious summer which is before us, says, "when He who is our life shall appear, we also shall be made manifest with Him in glory,"[2] using a great but vague word, which opens to us the hope of our one day reaching and having all that we think best, and care for most. But St. John is not vague, he gives us no choice of glories. He has thought of that which was to him by far the highest of all. He says that when at last it is manifested what we shall be, "*we shall*

[1] Rom. VIII. 19. [2] Col. III. 4.

be like Him," like God, like our Father in heaven. The likeness is spiritual, and we are able to think of what it is by looking to Christ. We are to be like Him in meekness, in gentleness, in sweetness, and in love, as well as in truthfulness—like Him, that is to say, in all righteousness. This is the glory that one day is to be ours, and there is none higher. Does this disappoint us? as being not our idea of heaven; yet this is none other than the glory of Christ Himself. There is none higher, even for Him, by whom God made the worlds. As for us, we not only do not reach it, it is part of our present misery that we often fail to see that it is glory at all. Yet the day is coming when it shall be revealed not only to us, but in us. Let us ever strive to fix our minds, so that we may have the glad hope of this Godlike glory of being like Him, and then, because we are like Him, of seeing Him as He is, with an undulled sense of His being, His purity and His love. Thenceforth having no more doubt, or error, or forgetfulness of Him, but an abiding and true vision of Him, not as our foolish and sinful thoughts often feign Him to be, but as He is—our Father, and in all the fulness of His grace, and love, and power—our Eternal portion.

Such then is our best hope. It is to be "like God," and to "see Him as He is." These two glories go together. Indeed, in a sense they are one, for neither can be without the other. For to

see God cannot mean to behold Him with the eye, as we do outward things. Spiritual sight is meant, and the word is used in contrast to believing. For seeing is not believing. To see is to reach the knowledge of a fact at once, and in a way more free from all doubt than by faith. Here and now we know God more by seeing that He must be, than by seeing that He is. We see certain things in ourselves and in the world, and gather from them that God must be, and that He must have a marked character and attributes. All about us are works, things clearly made, which show, as St. Paul teaches, that which may be known of God, so that we are without excuse if we believe not in His eternal power and Godhead.[1] But the time is coming when we shall not believe in God because we see that He must be, but when we shall see *Him*. How, or by what means, we know not. For we cannot yet tell how spirit can make itself known to spirit, without signals made by hand or tongue, but by some means we shall have an instant and abiding sense of the reality and nearness of God.

But there is more than this promised, "*we shall see Him as He is*." Here on earth the character of God is not fully known to us, above all we do not see what parts of it are greatest. Every real Christian has some real notion of it, but only some. With the true he mixes something of the false, for,

[1] Rom. I. 20.

although he does not know it, each really takes his own character as a guide to that of God. It is only wherein we are really like Him that we really know Him as He is. But, when we are quite delivered from the bondage of corruption, we shall see Him, not with a dim and troubled understanding, but with a clear joyful fellow-feeling with all that is His glory. We shall see Him no longer as in a flawed looking glass, but face to face, knowing Him, "even as we are known to Him."[1] When we become full partakers of the Divine nature, then we shall see God as He is.

It is clear that there will be thus made a great change in the standing of our souls towards God. Here we serve God, if not chiefly, at least partly, because we are *unlike* Him. He is so mighty, and we are so weak, that we must obey Him. He is so rich, and we so poor, that it is well for us to obey. But it is not to feel towards Him as children, when we thus reckon with Him profit and loss. It is slave-like to see in Him only power to punish, or wealth to reward. But one cannot easily break the bond of selfishness. How great the change when we shall escape into the region of love, where we shall fear nothing, but to lose sight of Him, and wish for nothing, but to speed at His bidding, or be allowed to stand and serve. Such is the bright hope before those who know to what the Gospel

[1] 1 Cor. XIII. 12.

tends. Such the issue of all that Christ has done for us, and the end of all that Christ is now doing with us, or for us. It is well with us when we feel that we have to hope for this, for the miserable risk is that we think we have already reached it,—that we are now quite like God, and that we have Him therefore fully in sight. Such a notion comes from pride, and from it cometh more pride, with spiritual idleness, and a growing unlikeness to God. But if we hope, then have we something of the humility of those who know that they have not attained, and the pressing onwards of those who long to lay hold on that for which Christ laid hold on them. The man strives, as St. John here says, to "*purify himself*."

We are wont to hold that we cannot cleanse ourselves. The evil in us is so ingrained. But here St. John says that "*Every one who has this hope in Him purifieth himself*." The writers of the Bible have too strong a grasp of truth to keep up carefully a shallow consistency in all that they teach. Sometimes they will place together in a single line two truths, which seem as if they could never agree, as when St. Paul calls on us to "work out our own salvation, seeing that it is God who worketh in us."[1] For indeed man is in many things a fellow-worker with God. Man cannot make corn grow without sunshine and rain, and

[1] Phil. II. 12.

these God alone can give, but He gives them in vain where man does not plough and sow and reap. So, though we are not purified but by the Holy Spirit, it is also true that we must work hard to purify ourselves. The Apostles Peter and Paul, and with them St. James, urge this on all Christians. Not that, while here on earth, the child of God can boast of keeping himself altogether pure, but he shrinks from impurity, and if it touch him, he seeks eagerly for cleansing, thinking all things to be defiling which seem to him not in keeping with that character of God, likeness to which he hopes one day to reach. He does not say I cannot purify myself, so I will not try. He cannot but try. If he really longs for perfect purity, and asks God to work it in him, he will be ever striving towards it himself. For the Holy Spirit acts not against our will, but with it and through it. He does not drive the soul, He persuades and enables it.

And here let it be kept in mind that the kind of purity, after which the Christian ought to strive, is that of God Himself, as set before us in His word, and by the conscience. The church has sometimes set up a standard of purity which is not that of God. Good men have thought themselves in this to be wiser, and even more holy, than He is. Let us be sure that we cannot add to the law of God without bringing on some evils greater than those we were trying to cast out.

To reach purity then, after the pattern of the purity of God, is our own highest aim, and God's highest aim with us. We are pardoned, the Holy Spirit is given to us, our lives are ordered by the wisdom and power of God, that at the last we may be holy as He is holy. If we lose sight of this, we cannot understand God, or our own lives, or why God put us here, or what He does with us. If all has not been to make us holy, then all is utter vanity.

Chap. III. vv. 4, 5.

Every one that doeth sin doeth also lawlessness: and sin is lawlessness. And ye know that He was manifested to take away sins; and in Him is no sin.

The authorized version hides much of the force of this verse by putting the words "*Transgression of the law*" in place of the right word "*lawlessness*." St. John has set before us the child of God as striving to shape his inner and outer life after the pattern of God's purity. This is to him a law: he must in each thought and act make himself as like God as he can. He must give himself no freedom of choice. His will must be to do what he knows to be the will of the All-wise, and Truthful, and Loving God. What he does apart from faith, that is, without minding that will, he sees to be sin,

because in that he has been lawless. Over against him St. John puts the man who has no rule of life, who simply pleases himself, obeying the desires of his own flesh and mind, allowing neither God nor man to pass within the edge of the circle he has drawn round himself. All within it is his own, and all of that he will keep to himself; no one has any claim upon it, no one has a right to tell him what to do with it. This is lawlessness, which is indeed a form of selfishness. Nothing can be further from the mind of God. For there is no act of God which is not wrought under the great laws of truth, and justice, and love. It is that we mean when we say that He is righteous. God cannot do everything, for there can be no Being so strongly bound by duty as He is. He would cease to be what He is, did He in that which is least break the eternal law of right, and it is towards likeness to Him, in this respect for law, that we, if we be His children, must ever be striving. We too must obey all the laws which He obeys, and in obedience to which were all things made which have been made. To be lawless therefore is to jar with harsh discord against the harmony of the universe. Not that any man can by an act of his will put himself outside of the working of law upon him. Fire will hurt him, force can bind him, poison will kill him, and therefore the most self-willed man obeys certain laws, but only because he fears to be hurt if he does not yield

to them. When he knows as a fact that fire burns, or that theft will put him in jail, he bows to the force of that fact. But he never ceases to struggle against all belief in such facts, and in spite of the warnings given him by the Word and Providence of God he sets himself against the great stream of the universe, which cannot fail sooner or later to overwhelm him. Let it be kept in mind that this is what is done by us every time we sin; we not only set ourselves against authority, we also deny the truth of God's witness to some eternal facts. We put ourselves outside of the laws which give order, and firmness, and strength to all the world and to God. Happy indeed if, before we are crushed under Ezekiel's dreadful wheels, we are lifted into safety by God Himself. There reigns for each of us an eternal "*must*" and "*must not,*" which it is deadly peril to gainsay, and life and peace to obey. "This do," said Christ, "and thou shalt live."[1]

St. John goes on to give another reason why all the children of God should be righteous. It was, he says, for the sake of taking away sins, or of making man righteous that God manifested Himself to us. It is of God that St. John has hitherto been speaking. It is God therefore who was manifested for that end. We know that the Word, who was "with God," and "is God," who "came in the

[1] Luke X. 28.

flesh," is Jesus Christ, who is thus plainly set forth here as God. Since this is true, how clear is it that by no other means could sin be taken away. We would need a knowledge as great as that of God Himself to know what He can do: but here we may be sure that He would not have taken this way to save us from the power of sin if He had been able to take any other. It may not be clear to us why, for this end, so costly a sacrifice must be made. But we know that made it was, and we see from the greatness of it, that it could not but be made, and thus learn that to the laws which God lays on His children He submits Himself, and that these laws therefore have not their rise in His mere will, but are themselves eternal. There is in God a "*must*" and a "*must not,*" which set bounds to Him, even as they set bounds to us.

To reach this truth through the manifestation of God in Christ is in itself a large step towards righteousness. To know that the laws which God lays on us are such, as that He could give us no other, helps us not only to a sense of their binding force, but makes us feel that when we obey them we are in true fellowship with the Lawgiver and He with us. Besides, it is thus opened up to us, in part at least, why disobedience to them cannot be lightly passed over by a simple act of God's will; while, at the same time, it is seen that if the sin of any one be not taken away, the issues to

him must be awful beyond any ever known to us here.

We do not wonder then to find that God has always manifested Himself, in whatever way, with a view to the taking away of sin. The great lesson taught by the history of the world, and very clearly by that of the Jews, is that sin and misery cannot be disjoined, but are ever coupled together by a longer or shorter chain. If God be righteous, in St. John's sense of the word, He cannot but wish to cut that chain, and so save the sinful creature from the misery thus bound to him. But that He should manifest this wish not only in many warnings, by word and deed, against sin, but by sending His own Son to suffering and death—if taking this in, we can feel what it means, as those can best do who know for themselves what a Father's love is, we are overwhelmed by the many and great truths thus made clear to us.

It would be well if all Christians quite understood that the great end of God when He manifested Himself in Christ was to bring men to be like Himself, in goodness and happiness, by taking away sins, or, as it is put in the kindred passage (v. 8), by destroying the works of the devil. We know, indeed, that as a first step towards this our Saviour needed to make sure of pardon for the sinner. But pardon by itself to the man over whom sin still has sway would be as useless as to forgive a prisoner

if his cell was still kept barred. Therefore it is that St. John, looking past all else, sees God in Christ not bearing our sins, as indeed He did "in His own body on the cross," but as taking sins away. Not as making us safe from punishment but free from sin. In reality, however, if we get rid of mere words, we can see that safety from punishment is nothing else than pardon for sin, since to go on in sin is the real punishment for sinning. If a man, "joined to his idols," be left alone with them, his doom is sealed.[1] St. Paul likens such a state to a living man left close bound to a dead body, and it is from this state that, with strong feeling, he thanks God that there is deliverance through Jesus Christ, his Lord.[2] So here St. John writing to those who like St. Paul had the anointing (Chap. II. 20) says, Ye know, ye have come to know, as one of the facts to which you can from your own knowledge bear witness, that all that Jesus was and did, His coming, His ministry, His suffering, His death, His resurrection and ascension have all led up to taking away your sins. So from all that your life has taught you, as well as from the words of Gabriel, you know why He was called Jesus.[3]

We see that in the angel's message to Joseph, as well as here, the word is "*sins*" not "*sin,*" for it is not from a vague dislike to law, but from each and every act wrought in lawlessness, that we have

[1] Hos. IV. 17. [2] Rom. VII. 24. [3] Matt. I. 21.

escape through the manifestation of God in Jesus Christ. Let it also be marked that our sins are thus taken away, because Jesus was the manifestation of God, because in Him the very heart of God is laid open to us. So long as the thought of God affrights us we cannot but feel towards Him dislike, even if outwardly we obey Him. The manifestation which He makes to us of Himself in Christ shows us how mistaken we were about Him. He is not our enemy; He is a pitying and loving Father, who beseeches us to be reconciled to Him. If hopelessness of pardon had made us reckless in sin, we now see that He is rich in mercy, ready to forgive. If, with only dread in our hearts, we found it hard to obey Him, Christ changes this into the happy constraint of thankfulness and love, setting before us at the same time in His life the beauty of holiness in such wise that we long to be like Him. He too Himself coming to each of us, as one who is with His people always, does not leave us to fight out alone our battle with sin. He is with us, who once fought with the same foes. He knows our weakness and our strength, and is there with His timely aid. For one of the fruits of the sacrifice of Christ was the gift of the Holy Spirit. Before the death of Christ "the Holy Spirit was not given, because Jesus was not yet glorified"[1]; for He had not yet reached by dying the height of His glory. But

[1] John VII. 39.

now He is given to all who ask for Him, strengthening them "with all might inwardly in the inner man." Christ then becomes to us not only a friend for whose sake we fight against sin, but also through His Spirit a living source within us of a might whereby we get the better of sin after sin, till at last no sin shall be left to hurt us. It is in this way that God manifested in Christ takes away our sins.

St. John adds in a single line, "*and in Him was no sin,*" thus showing us that inasmuch as Christ was sinless and so needed no atonement for Himself, He had therefore a right to do for us all He did in taking away our sins; and also that all was done by Him, not with any doubtful thought, but as the simple outcome of that true unselfish love, wherein sinlessness is found, and which was, and ever is, the highest glory of the only begotten Son of the righteous God.

Chap. III. v. 6.

Whosoever abideth in Him sinneth not: whosoever sinneth hath not seen Him, neither knoweth Him.

By what St. John has just said, he has taught the need of righteousness in all who call themselves the children of God; and has thus made us more ready to listen to what he has next to say. For indeed it is not easy to go along with him when he

now seems to tell us that the Christian never sins. If so, who can be a Christian? Now we may be at once sure that whatsoever it be that St. John here means, it is not that a child of God cannot sin. He has already said (Chap. I. v. 8) that "if we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us," and again (Chap. v. v. 16) he tells us that if any man see a brother sin, he is to do certain things. Nor would there be any sense in his telling us to purify ourselves, if we were already pure, or to strive after likeness to Christ, if we are already like Him. This likeness to Christ is set before us as our highest aim, and to reach it as our best hope. Our life is to be one of endeavour rather than of achievement: for a perfect likeness to Christ, though sought and longed for by many, was never yet manifested by any man on earth.

What, then, does St. John mean by saying that the believer never sins? But that is not what he says. He does not tell us that the man who has believed in Christ never sins; the words he uses are—"Whosoever *abideth* in Him sinneth not." Now, in the beginning of Chap. II. there is a line drawn between being in Christ and abiding in Him, and we ourselves surely know something of it. There is an hour, more or less clearly marked, when a man first believes in Jesus Christ. But we are greatly mistaken as to what faith really is, if we think it comes to nothing more than to his merely

ceasing to doubt or hate truths about Him. From that point we must go on to a sense of the reality of Christ Himself, as a Being, a living Person, near us, seeing us, knowing us; One who has a character quite His own, and who has done certain things; who has feelings towards us, and a formed judgment upon us, thinking well of us, and again not thinking well of us. A living Christ, not to be seen or heard, or touched by us, but still as really near us as aught else about us—nay, nearer us, for He is close to our inmost thoughts. Believers, rightly so called, have more or less clearly this sense of a real, living, present Christ. Their chief effort is to have more of it, so as to live always under the power of it. For with us this sense is far indeed from abiding. It may be that it is not so much as often reached. It is surely a good day with any Christian when he can say, I have really felt the presence beside me of Christ. There are breaks in the life of faith, gaps between the sights we have of "Him who is invisible."[1] We all surely know what it is to feel His presence, and not to feel it; and this not more because all peace and spiritual joys come and go with Him, than because we know that we need to be in His presence if we are to be thoroughly good. Surely it is true that we cannot sin in thought, in word, in deed, while we are feeling that He is beside us.

[1] Heb. XI. 27.

It is then while this sense of the presence of Christ lasts that we are abiding in Him. We all know how strong the effect on us is of the presence of another—nay, of the vivid thought of another, though he cannot, like Christ, be really beside us. How many a youth, who has gone out into the world, has been saved from the sins of it, by the thought of his mother and her well ordered house. How much more if we have not only the thought of our Father in heaven, and of Him who died for us, but the feeling also that He is close to us! While the vision lasts we cannot sin. It would be a horror to sin. But the vision does fade, and then the evil, that has been watching for that fading, again creeps near us. The body of sin and death again clings to us. Well for us if we can then with a true heart cry, as the Psalmist so often did, "Hear me speedily, O Lord, for my spirit faileth; hide not Thy face from me, lest I be like to those who go down into the pit."[1]

It is in such hours or days that the believer feels the power of darkness, and that those struggles go on between what he can recall of Christ and the urgings of selfishness, which take up so large a part of his life. While he abode in Christ, he had the peace and rest of a sure fortress; no evil touched him with power to hurt, no spiritual plague came near him. It is outside of it that he is set upon,

[1] Ps. CXLIII. 7.

and even beaten down and so wounded as that men may say of him—he is dead. The Epistle to the Hebrews tells us (Chap. vi. 4) how such an one can fall so as really to die. But the cases are surely very rare in which Christ is quite forgotten, or even long forgotten, by the man who has once known and felt that his living Saviour is beside him. He may, like St. Peter, sin; but his Lord turning and looking upon him will fill him with remorse, deepened by the knowledge that He whom He had denied had already pled for his pardon with the Father. He will come to believe that God has forgiven him, but he will not readily forgive himself. The time will come when he will again feel that Christ is beside him. But he will not then boast that he is ready to die for his Master, though indeed he is in that hour very ready. "Lord, Thou knowest all things; Thou knowest that I love thee," is all the sorrowful man can say. It is very sad to know that even after that he can sin again, and yet again. But weak and unstable we indeed are, and shall be, till God shall at last unite us to those who in heaven are, not for a while, but "for ever with the Lord." Nevertheless it is true—and that is what we have just now to mark—that the child of God, while he abides in Christ, sinneth not. Or, in other words, the shield of faith must be let fall, or basely cast away, before the fiery darts of the wicked one can reach him.

But there is another view of the same truth set before us by St. John in the second part of this verse, which fits in well with the line of his thought. A believer, as we have seen, may sin by not abiding in Christ, but he may also sin because, even though he may know and feel that Christ is a living Presence, he has never yet seen Him or known Him clearly enough to find out that some of his own acts are really unchristian. It is strange to notice how slow the church has been,—how slow Christians even still are,—to see that some of the things calmly done, or allowed as lawful, are foreign to the mind and character of Christ. But if we are the children of God we must be growing in the knowledge of Him, and therefore in the knowledge also of what is like or unlike Him, or, in other words, of what is right or wrong. Thus many acts and feelings are seen to be sinful for which we had not been used to blame ourselves, and some things to be lawful which we once thought of as forbidden, for we have been getting a conscience ever more and more awakened and taught. Yet all the while some things which we had allowed were, as we now see, wrong. Missionaries tell us that we must not judge their converts harshly because they do not at once see sin as we see it. Men whose forefathers had lived for ages under a tyranny from which the only refuge was falsehood, if they come to believe in Christ, can scarcely be brought to see that a lie

is wicked. In the Church of the Reformation, for more than two hundred years, none, save a very few, saw it to be a sin not to preach the Gospel to the heathen; and we can never say that the people, who within our own memory upheld slavery, were not, many of them, true Christians. If we may judge of what is to be, from what has been, it is likely that in another hundred years the church will hate, as jarring with the mind of Christ, some things which we allow or even praise. May it not be so with war? Thus it has been, and thus it will be, till the end comes. For we cannot deem ourselves as at the point where nothing further can be seen or known of Christ, and therefore nothing more than is just now seen to be wrong in the feelings and lives of His people. It was a sin, we say, not to give the Gospel to the heathen, and a sin to foster slavery. But these sins were wrought by Christians because, as touching such things, they had not known the mind of Christ, although as to much else they seem to have known Him as well, or even better, than we do.

Let us then be glad of the promise of verse 2nd, that we one day "shall be like Him, and see Him as He is." Then we shall see sin as He sees it. Meanwhile let us make it a duty to judge with charity those Christians who do things which we think wrong, but in which they clearly see no harm. Let us rather believe that as they have not seen

some things in Christ which we have seen, so we on the other hand may not have seen all in Christ that has been clear to them. It is far from likely that we alone of all Christians are quite free from blindness of the spirit. Let us give all weight to the points wherein others agree with us, and if in anything they be otherwise minded, let us bethink ourselves that we cannot be sure but that it is to us, and not to them, that the truth needs to be revealed by God.[1]

Chap. III. v. 7.

My little children, let no man lead you astray: he that doeth righteousness is righteous, even as He is righteous.

St. John has already said that the child of God "purifieth himself even as God is pure." The purity at which he aims will be the purity of God. He now wishes to make this very clear. "*He that doeth righteousness is righteous, even as He is righteous.*" His righteousness will be of the same kind as that of God. St. John says this with much tenderness. He thinks of his converts as babes in Christ, little children, without knowledge or guile, and therefore easily misled. "*Let no man,*" he says, "*lead you astray*" on this point. In the first chapter St. John has spoken of those falsehoods

[1] Phil. III. 15.

which help men to believe that there is no such thing as sin. It is not unlikely that this may have been part of the false teaching of the Antichrists. They may have spoken of God's law as not binding on Himself : of His being therefore able to change that law if He pleased, and thus give license to His children : or, at any rate, to pardon them very easily if they take it.

Some such falsehoods may have been taught, but we know that they readily spring up of themselves. The instinct of creatures, made at first in the image of God, leads us to judge of God by what we know of man. We forget that man is fallen, and because we see that kings and great men often make laws for others, which they do not themselves keep, we think that lawlessness belongs to sovereignty, and therefore to God. One so great as He may surely lay on others such laws as He pleases, and Himself do what He likes, so that the line drawn between the lawful and the unlawful is fixed only by the sovereign choice of the strongest Being in the universe, though strength has nothing to do with goodness. Besides, if we look at God's dealings with men, we see that He often lifts up the wicked, and casts down the good. He cannot therefore care much for goodness.

All this the Apostle would deny. The word righteous has the same sense in heaven and on earth. If a man be really righteous here, his

righteousness will be the same as that of God. His justice is the same, his truth the same, his love the same. Let this be a settled truth with us. A man may not take his own notion, or the world's, of what righteousness is. There is only one kind of rightousness. God is indeed of unbounded kindness towards His children, but He will not, nay He cannot, to please them, make for them a special kind of righteousness; it must be the same as His own eternally has been.

We can, no doubt, without any thought of God, understand so far what righteousness is. The conscience helps us to this, and we can often mark what comes in the end of the doings of men. We can gather much also from the laws which nations have made. But we do not thus reach any sure rule to guide us in all we have to do. Men are often not at one about the right and the wrong, the fair and the unfair. But even if we could all be of one mind, when justice and truth alone are on trial, we have still to ask with much doubt where to draw the line up to which our neighbour has a claim on our love. For St. John, as we have seen, takes in love as part of righteousness. Every man, good or bad, wise or foolish, rich or poor, happy or wretched, has an equal right to get justice from us, and that at whatever cost. Even if our neighbour has no claim on our justice, if he be simply unhappy and helpless, then we, if we be truly righteous, must help him if

we can, not grudging in doing so some self-denial. But how much are we to deny ourselves?

It is at this point that all guidance fails us, but that which we get from God. We cannot trust to pity, for that is blind, and has little lasting strength. Yet it is just in the doubtful cases raised by pity that we need guidance most. If then we follow that of God, we see that it is not a part of righteousness to make all men equal. God has not done so, and we cannot. Those who, as a part of righteousness, would urge this equality on us, speak as if the holding of more or less money or land was all that made men unequal. But God has not so ordered this world as that money, or power of any kind, can make ours the things in it which are most to be prized.

Health and strength of body, and soundness of mind, with cleverness and wisdom, are goods which God has given to man with a hand truly unequal, and so given as that by no means can we do more than a very little to lessen the inequality. No man, however strong his wish, can part with even the least of these gifts, or any part of it, so as to help another with it who may be utterly wretched for the want of it. A strong man cannot save his dearest friend from death by making over to him some of his own overflowing health. What God has given us we must use for the good of others, but with the single exception of money, or property, or time,

we cannot strip ourselves of one of these gifts, so as to hand it over to our brother. Christ everywhere teaches us to work for others, to think for them, if need be to suffer for them, and to give them the use of our knowledge, and skill, and time, as well as our money. The strong are to bear the infirmities of the weak. He that hath two coats must impart to him that hath none.[1] But this does not mean that, even when we can do it, we are to bring ourselves down to the level of our lowest neighbour. No doubt we must do so if we cannot otherwise help him. But Christ does not say that the man who has three coats must give one of them to the man who has one coat already, nor must we foster sloth in our neighbour by giving him what is ours, if he is able to get it for himself: for "if any man will not work, neither shall he eat."[2] Many questions of duty of this sort arise. It is enough to notice one or two of them to see how the Apostle in giving us the righteousness of God as our pattern helps us to a right judgment. He could not make us equal to Himself, but to save us from our helpless misery He spared not even that which was dearest to Him. No righteousness can be higher than His. We shall certainly find it enough to make ours as like it as we can. Let us further remember that our duty in this takes in, not only our outward dealings with our neighbour, but also

[1] Luke III. 11. [2] 2 Thess. III. 10.

our feelings towards him. We are bound, whether we like him or not, to do him the fullest justice, and to use the utmost charity in all our thoughts about what he does and is. We often need to believe that God in His righteousness is perfectly fair in His judgments on us. Let us aim at being ever fair to our neighbour, though his ways are not our ways, nor his thoughts our thoughts.

We have been thinking of that high and noble righteousness which allows all the claims of God-like love; but there are few Christians who need to think only of their failures in reaching that highest point, to see how often they must seek pardon of God. For it is easy indeed to break loose from mere justice and truth, and without sense of sin to do what is dishonest, if only the law allows it. The sum of all is, that there is no standard high enough, and steady enough, to make clear to us what righteousness really is, save that which we have in God made manifest in Jesus Christ. We may do some very righteous things, but our righteousness will be ill balanced and unfinished if we are not "righteous as He is righteous."

Chap. III. v. 8.

He that doeth sin is of the devil; for the devil sinneth from the beginning. To this end was the Son of God manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil.

The change in the R.V. from "committeth sin" to "*doeth sin*," is not useless, for it points back to the "*doeth righteousness*" of the 7th verse. In the one case St. John is not thinking of single acts of righteousness, nor here of single acts of sin, but of the principles of a man, the bias of his nature, the spiritual region in which he lives. The righteous man may fall into single acts of sin, and the unrighteous man may rise to some acts of great goodness. The one may for a time forget what is due to his neighbour, the other cease from his worship of self, but both return speedily to their proper element.

It is here said of the man who doeth sin that he is of the devil, whom St. John clearly takes to be a person. There are those who stumble at there being a devil. But surely it is not more easy to find a place in God's universe for a bad man, who tempts to sin, than for an evil spirit. Anyone forging a Bible would have said much about Satan; for he would thus have interested us, as Milton has done, and no one could have gainsaid him. But

our Scriptures give us a hint of their origin, by telling us strangely little about him. We gather only that he hates all good; that by means of falsehood he has gained so much power in the world, as to be in a sense the prince of it, and that he is allowed to tempt or try the people of God. By what means he touches the soul we cannot tell. But this we know, that he can only hold out evil to us; he cannot force evil on us. The shield of faith, if we keep it ready, can quench all his fiery darts; and the true child of God, though he may fall before a sudden onset, will yet rise again. If Satan enters his heart with an evil thought, the Christian hastens to cast it out, feeling at the same time that it is less painful to think of anything so vile, as coming to him from without, than as springing up within himself.

Of the devil, it is here said that he "*sinneth.*" That is to say, that he goes on in sinning. Evil is his good, and to do evil his chief aim. "*He sinneth,*" we are further told, "*from the beginning.*" It may be thought that the beginning here spoken of is the same as that in which St. John in his Gospel says that the Word "was," and that the evil one is therefore an eternal being, and at no time created by God. Many have held that natural religion teaches this, and would like to believe it. St. John, however, in his Gospel tells us that Christ said of Satan, that "he abode not in the truth,"[1]

[1] John VIII. 44.

whence, as from other Scriptures, we gather that when he was created he stood in the truth, but kept not his first estate. It is therefore likely that it was because he had fallen into sin before man was placed in Eden, and because there, by his temptation, he wrought in Adam spiritual death, that he is spoken of as sinning, and as being "*a murderer from the beginning.*"

We are also here told that men can be "*of him,*" and even be his children (v. 10). He is thus spoken of as elsewhere God is. But the words cannot have the same sense in both cases. The devil can destroy, but he cannot create. He cannot make men his children; he becomes their father when they adopt him, not when he adopts them. They can range themselves on his side; they can give themselves up to him, and thus become "*of him,*" as being with him against God.

We need not here try to reckon up the works of the devil, or the evils he has wrought on the earth. His great aim has been to mar the creation of God, by bringing into it sin, and misery, and death. We ourselves are nearly touched by these truths, because these works of the devil have been wrought, not only around us, but in us; and it is in us that the great work of Christ, in destroying the works of the devil, has been carried on. We know—and to many of us it is a sad knowledge—that we began by being of the devil, and that it was through the

manifestation to us of the Son of God that we became of God. We are most unwilling to believe that we ever were of the devil, but we mean nothing else when we call Christ our Saviour. All about Satan is most painful to us, and tries our faith, but so do all the questions easily put about sin. Why was sin ever allowed by God to enter this world? We cannot answer that question, and of this we may be sure: that the reasons could not be weak which were enough to lead God to allow that to be done which could be undone only by the manifestation of Christ. The state of evil into which sin brought the world is clearly one which no act of mere power could put right. Before the mystery of sin we may well hold our peace, when we see how it moved God Himself; when we see Him, that He might save us from it, not sparing His own Son, but giving Him up to the death for us all.

Chap. III. v. 9.

Whosoever is begotten of God doeth no sin, because His seed abideth in him; and he cannot sin, because he is begotten of God.

St. John has twice already set over against each other those who are of God and those who are of the devil. Here he does so again. He marks out the children of God by three sets of words. In verse 3rd they are those who try to purify them-

selves. In verse 6th they are those who abide in Christ. Here they are those who are "*begotten of God.*" Of these, the two first cannot be without the last; while the first might be a passing wish without the second. To the children of the devil, St. John gives only one mark. He does not say that they do not believe, or that they have no hope, or that they do not abide, but simply that "*every one that doeth sin is of the devil.*" On the other hand, the child of God "*purifieth himself,*" "*sinneth not,*" "*doeth no sin.*" In neither case are feelings or notions taken as a trustworthy mark of a man's spiritual state. He may have much emotion, and be very sure that all is right with him; he may even do many things which seem to show zeal for Christ. In His name he may prophesy and cast out devils, and do many mighty works, and yet Christ may not have known him. It is enough to condemn him if, with all, he has been working iniquity. This truth is laid down with even greater force in this verse than in the 6th verse, under which it has been so far dealt with. "*Whosoever is begotten of God,*" St. John now says, "*doeth no sin,*" and "*he cannot sin.*"

It is needless again to make it clear that St. John cannot mean that the Christian never falls into a sin. He himself allows, with all Scripture, that the child of God can and does sin. What then does he mean here? To say that he is speaking of the

Christian life as it is in idea, though not in fact, is not enough. It is better to allow that this is a hard saying, and then to try, if by looking narrowly into ourselves, we cannot find there something which may serve, partly at least, to make us believe it. Now we know that when a man is begotten of God, or becomes a child of God, a great change passes upon him. He becomes like his Father in heaven. But we do not mean by this that the whole man, with all that goes to make him a man, at once undergoes that great change. That on which the change is wrought is the deepest nature, what may be called the innermost man, what St. Peter calls the "hidden man of the heart."[1]

If we carefully look into ourselves we can see this hidden man of the heart, apart from the rest of what we call "*us*" or "*ourselves*." We know that much that belongs to us and goes to make us up, takes its own way, and does its own work, apart from our guidance. We cannot tell our eyes to see better, or our ears to hear better, or our heart to beat more slowly, or our muscles to be stronger, or our nerves firmer. These are our tools with which we work, but if they be blunt or bad, all that we can do is to try to get them mended or sharpened. They are indeed part of ourselves, yet we do not so think of them. We praise or blame them, we are pleased or pained by them, much as a man is

[1] 1 Peter III. 4.

with the servants in his house. It is so too with the powers of our mind, with our memory, our imagination, our intellect. We can look at each of these in ourselves as apart from ourselves. We can be glad or sorry about them, but we can only take them as they are, whether weak or strong, blunt or sharp. We can train them a little, but that is all. It is not otherwise with our passions, appetites, desires. We think about them, and have feelings about them, marking with pleasure or pain their strength or weakness and the lines in which they run. We blame a man who gives the rein to his passions, speaking of them as we would of his horses. We pity another man, because as we say, his appetites are too strong for him. "*For him*," we say, as if he was quite another from his appetites, which in spite of him are having their own way. If we blame him, it is not for having those appetites, but for not keeping them in check. In our daily use of words, a man can be out of his mind, he can be beside himself, he can even come to himself. There are times when we find ourselves gazing into our own minds as we might into a pit, with strange living creatures in it. We wonder, as we look at them, what they will do next. So alien do our inmates sometimes seem to be from ourselves.

These inmates were given by God to man, when he was first made, that they might be his servants. Without desires, and appetites, and passions, the

creature could not do his proper work in the world. He would not indeed be a man. They were to be his servants, kept by him each in its right place, and to its right task. But helped by Satan, whose great feat this was, they rose up against the man and became his masters, ruling him and carrying him along with them in their blind headlong courses. Not that he does not hold back. The man is often pained by his weakness against them; he struggles with them, he even gets the better of some of them, who through time or circumstance have lost or never reached their strength. But among them there always arises one stronger than the rest, who keeps the man in a bondage from which he cannot get free. Besides, he becomes used to the bondage, and at last does not try to be free, even when his evil masters go on to vex him with new affronts.

It was this bitter unhappiness of man that moved the pity of God, and it is to man thus wretched that He comes, when by the might of the Holy Spirit He makes him a new creature—a child of God. But, be it kept in mind, it is this inner man of the heart, this deeper nature, this spirit that is in man, that thus becomes a child of God. At first he is no more than a child, a babe in Christ, as to the Divine nature now given him, and he has still about him the masterful slaves who had brought him into bondage. But he has now a purpose, from which he cannot be turned, and a life that cannot be taken

from him, for it is "hid with Christ in God."[1] The undying seeds of that which must grow into a likeness to his Heavenly Father are abiding in him. He no longer can go along with his passions in their evil doings. The spirit of the man has been renewed, and thenceforth a struggle goes on, which will never end till righteousness has gained the day. He cannot always overcome, for he is still a child, and he has to fight not with flesh and blood only, but with spiritual foes, who are many and strong, and who hate him with a cruel hatred. But, with the life of God in him, he grows in strength, and one after another the thoughts and imaginations of the man are brought under subjection to an obedience, like that in which Christ ever kept His.[2] In this warfare he often fails. That which he hates he sometimes does. The good, which he would, he does not, but rather the evil which he would not; but he, the inward man, renewed day by day, delights in the law of God. Overpowered by the force or cunning of an onset he may be cast down, but he is not destroyed. He is never glad in sin, or thinks little of sinning. He is deeply moved by it; he hates it, and flies to his Father for help against it; he keeps out of the way of it, and forces his eyes to turn from beholding it. The seed of God, as St. John calls it, abideth in him, and in a real sense, he, the true man cannot

[1] Col. III. 3. [2] 2 Cor. X. 5.

sin. It is this story of the child of God, and his conflicts with sin, that St. Paul gives with tragic force in the seventh chapter of the Epistle to the Romans.

There can be no doubt that, to soothe his restless children, frightened by the darkness around them, Satan may quote to them some of the words which St. Paul here uses. It is not you, he may say, that sin, but something in you that is not you—sin, namely, that dwelleth in you. You may therefore let the sin take its own way; for since it is not you, it cannot be you who are answerable for it. Those who wish to sin will gladly listen to him. But the child of God will drive such a falsehood from among his thoughts. He does not wish to sin. The last thing he would seek for would be peace in sinning. He keeps before him, above all others, those truths which make sin most hateful.

Let this too be said that, in judging of the real state of the inner man of the heart, we are wise (for we thus can do ourselves no harm) when we treat ourselves with harshness even and doubt, but our neighbour with a charity that thinketh no evil. The sins which carry shame on their forehead are not by any means the most dangerous. There are in the world those who, as seen by us, are waging a losing warfare with some disgraceful lust; who, in the sight of God, who searches the heart, have more of His life in them than the man who, thanking

God daily that he is not as other men are, is yet led, a willing captive, by some respectable iniquity; or even than one who, fenced round from his birth with every safeguard, has scarcely known what temptation is. The oak, one-sided and stunted to a bush, on the verge of a sea-washed cliff, shows that it has at least as much life in it as its tall and graceful brother that, planted in the depth of a sheltered glen, has never known what it is to be shaken or even touched by a rugged blast.

Chap. III. v. 10.

In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil: whosoever doeth not righteousness is not of God, neither he that loveth not his brother.

It is clearly with some thought of the risk we run of thinking too well of ourselves, that St. John now goes on again to urge on us the tests whereby we may find out how we stand with God. We think we are—we say we are—His children. But is it really so? I have believed in Christ, one says. That indeed is good, if it is true. I belong to a Christian church. That also is good. I have been guilty of no crime—I give myself to no vice. Among my neighbours my life is free from blame. So far all is good. Only, may you not be mistaken,

let us say, about your faith in Christ? You speak glibly about faith, but are you quite sure you know what faith is? The Christ in whom you trust, is He the real Christ? for remember there are still many false Christs. You say that you are free from crime and vice; are you speaking of what men know of you, or of what God, who searches the heart, can see in you? You are blameless before the laws of the world, but have you thought of the exceeding breadth of God's law? In short, there is clearly here some risk of error, and that about much which cannot safely be left in doubt. And the risk is felt to be greater when we see how sharp and narrow the line is which St. John draws between those who are, and those who are not, the children of God. He thinks that every man is the one or the other. There is with him no middle class, as we often think there must be. It seems cruel to say of some men that they are of the devil, very cruel and untrue to have that said of ourselves; yet there cannot but be this narrow line, clearly seen by God, though not by us, and no doubt often drawn by Him not quite where we would be ready to mark it, but still drawn by Him. In his sight each man is a child of God or a child of the devil.

To think that we can draw the line between them is to be guilty of the sin of judging others, against which our Lord warns us. But while we therefore dare not settle the place of our neighbour, there can

be nothing more wise than to settle our own, making it sure that we are not on Satan's side of the line. It may be said that we must sometimes judge our neighbour. Christ shows that we may lawfully think of some men as if they were dogs or swine.[1] He tells us also how we are to know false prophets; and here St. John shows us in what the children of the devil are manifest. In each of these cases a clear ground of judgment is laid down for us, "*He that doeth not righteousness is not of God.*" Even here, however, we must be very careful, not in our own case, but in our neighbour's. For it may be that we have reached a higher place in the school of righteousness than the man we are judging has reached. We have come to see that slavery is unrighteous; are we therefore to say that all who ever were slave-holders were not of God? The truth is that the sense of righteousness grows, and has grown, in the household of God, ever since Moses. The parable of the good Samaritan opened up new truth to those who heard it from Christ. Since His time, and surely in these latter days, the church has grown in the grace of charity. In many things it may justly seem to us that we also have been trained to a higher sense of duty than we had at first. Hence the risk of unfairness in judging others, even in the cases, and with the tests which God allows. He only who knows what is in man can judge him

[1] Matt. VII. 6.

according to what he has, or has not. But we are not therefore hindered from judging ourselves. St. Paul strongly urges this upon us as a duty[1]; and St. John takes for granted that we can do it, when he tells us that the children of God can be made manifest. There is no mark, such as we might have looked for, on them by which they may be known. They are not freed from pain and sickness, from loss and sorrow. They cannot seal themselves as the children of God by what they say of themselves or to others: for good words come easily to some. The one mark is to be found in what they do.

But of what kind are the deeds that show that we are the children of God? Not always what we call religious works (Matt. XXIII. 14); not zeal in making men think as we do; not long prayers, but the doing righteousness. But is not this to lead away from high thoughts of God, from child-like trust in His promises, and from rest on the great work of Christ? Nay, St. John is not speaking here of our pardon, nor of our being welcomed by God as His children; nor of our faith in Christ, but of our faith in ourselves. It is we who are believing that we are pardoned by God, and have become His sons; and it is that faith in our own judgment on ourselves that St. John would have us test. If you are right in thinking, he says, that you through Christ have become a child of God, you must also have become

[1] 1 Cor. IX. 31.

a doer of righteousness, for "*whosoever doeth not righteousness is not of God.*"

Much has already been said about what this righteousness is. The man who is righteous as God is righteous, not only doeth no injustice to his neighbour, but also allows all the claims made on him by the want, the misery, the danger of another. But it may again be said, by being righteous in this way we do our duty to man, but not to God; we fulfil what morality, but not what religion asks of us. To say this is to repeat one of Satan's every-day falsehoods. When we speak of our neighbour, we are not forgetting God, for surely He is nearer to us than any other. If we are righteous, we feel that we must be just and honest in our dealings with Him. There are many who would at once know that they are sinners, if they could only see that God has, at any rate, the same rights as the men beside us, with whom we have dealings day by day. We are His servants; all we have of great or small has been entrusted to us by Him, and it is simply as honest servants and stewards that we have to deal with Him. So that we are righteous towards Him, not when we are praising Him, for that may be done from a love of music rather than of God, or even when we are asking Him to serve us, though that we may and must often do; but when we do His work with our time, our money, our strength, our lives; and we know that what we

do for our fellow-men He looks on as done for Himself.[1]

It is to make this the more clear to us that St. John tells us, in the last clause of the verse, that "*he that loveth not his brother is not of God.*" These words rather throw light on what has just been said, than add anything to it. They make sharp and piercing the edge of the test that the Apostle wishes us to use, so that we may clearly discern the intents of our hearts. We can baffle that test if we ask what are our thoughts of God and our feelings towards Him. We can easily say to ourselves that zeal for God set us on some pious work, which we really undertook to pass our time, to make money, or to flatter our vanity. But the question comes very near to us when it is—How do you treat your brother—your mother's son—your Christian brother—your brother man—the man, in short, who is nearest to you, whom you meet every day and know well? For it is much more easy to feel a large kindness to all our fellow-men, than to be truly righteous in our dealings with one of them. The difficulty of loving others with a Godlike love is not greatest when we are furthest from them. A brother offended is harder to be won than a city, and all history tells us that the Christian brother beside us, who on some point is not at one with us, is apt to be hated. But indeed the wretchedness, close to us, unsoothed, the

[1] Matt. XXV. 40.

ignorance untaught, the open selfishness unwarned, shows us how little we, the self-called children of God, copy Him in His righteousness, the lowest point of which is the simple justice which does not set itself above others; the highest point, that which, after the manner of Christ, sets others before self.

Chap. III. v. 11.

For this is the message which ye heard from the beginning, that we should love one another.

To give greater force to these truths, the Apostle here goes on to say that this law of Christlike love is not new; it is as old as Christianity itself. He has already spoken in the same way of this commandment given in another form (in Chap. II. v. 7). St. John thinks that we should very clearly see that to love one another is a duty, laid on all Christians by the first message brought to them from Christ by the apostles. There are many forms in which the Gospel message may be set before us. For it may be broken up into parts, each of which is to be prized, though each has some want if taken without the others. It tells us that God wishes to forgive us our sins, that Christ died for us, that the Holy Spirit is offered to us, as the best gift of God. But all this would be told in vain, apart from the further message that all else moves up to, and ends in, our rescue at last from all the power of sin. It is this

that fills the mind of St. John as he writes. He well knows how ready men are to pass over that part of the message; to take of it gladly all that is pleasant and soothing, all that tells of a free pardon of sin, all that saves from sorrow, that gives men the high place of sons among the creatures of God, and opens to them the gate of heaven. But when the great message speaks of self-denial, of taking up the Cross, of crucifying the flesh, and of making pure the heart, until we become righteous as Christ is righteous, we are ready to stop our ears. It becomes irksome to hear St. John going back again and again to righteousness, and a Christ-like walk, and brotherly love, as if the Gospel was not a good message sent to bring peace and rest to us, rather than labour and endless fighting. We thus show our love of sin, our worship of self; and it is by fostering in them this spirit of dislike to the Apostle's warnings, and sharp-edged tests of our real state, that Satan keeps as his own many who have a name to live. St. John knows that, if we will not use these tests of righteousness and brotherly love, we shall run the risk of living in a vain show.

Let us then set clearly before us as a fact that the great message which God sent to men from the first, is that they should love one another. It is from this principle of brotherly love, as from a root, that every law springs which God has given to man; and it is by keeping hold of it, therefore, that every

law is fulfilled. This principle underlies the law and the prophecy of the Old Testament. It is from it that the lives of the ancient worthies take the beauty, which they lose when they forget it. It is so, also, with the lives of those who are now about us in the world. We feel that there is a baseness in giving a very high place to a life, otherwise great, in which there is no trace of self-forgetfulness. It is the man who makes a real sacrifice for others to whom we give the best place in our hearts. Hence the glory which we see in God. To Him belong power, and wisdom, and knowledge, and sovereignty; but that which sets Him apart from all that has been called God, or worshipped, is His love. It is this in God which moves us towards Him, and keeps us with him. It is when Christ is lifted up on the Cross that He reaches that highest glory, which He takes from earth to heaven, and by it draws all men unto Him. To obey God merely because He has power to punish or reward is not proper Christian service. The child of God obeys his Father, not to escape anything, or to gain anything, but to show his awe of Him, his gratitude, and his love. Dread of God, along with love of self, may come in as motives, for indeed there are times when we need all the motives to good that we can gather; but we should be ashamed to need such as these, for the Christian is not the slave, but the child of God: he is called, not the servant, but the

friend of Christ.[1] It is in this spirit of love to God above him, and to his brother beside him, that the believer is held by St. John to live in the world.

It is likely that St. John greatly wished, at this time, when the spirit of disunion was among them, thus to strengthen the tie which should very closely bind together those who belonged to the Christian commonwealth. The tie by which we are bound to a church ought often to have no better name than that of partizanship. To see that it is well worth while to keep an unbroken front towards an enemy savours of wisdom, but not always of charity. St. John therefore would have us look nearer home, and have a true love for the Christians who are known to us by face and name, whom we meet in worship, or in work for Christ. There are a hundred things we can do for them day by day, if we really love them. It is by our way of treating them that we can best show that we have really felt the force of the great message which we have heard from the beginning, for they are the people whom we can help or hurt more than all others in the world.

[1] John XV. 15.

Chap. III. v. 12.

Not as Cain was of the evil one, and slew his brother. And wherefore slew he him? Because his works were evil, and his brother's righteous.

It is to bring out all the beauty of brotherly love that St. John here sets behind it, as a dark background, the murder of Abel by Cain. We are not told in the Bible that Cain wrought evil works in his earlier life. He could then have few openings for them: but it is not unlikely that the first-born, the man from the Lord, perhaps looked on as the seed of the woman who should bruise the serpent's head, was treated by his parents with an unwise fondness that fostered in him selfishness and pride. When his brother Abel was born, whose name is said to mean vanity or uselessness, and who was perhaps therefore very unlike Cain in strength, both of body and mind, he was set lower than his brother. Their pursuits were equally harmless, yet out of them arose sin and misery. Cain, the strong man, betook himself to tillage: Abel, more feeble, to tending sheep. Adam and Eve, wandering outside of Eden, had kept up some worship of God by animal sacrifices; for they were clothed in the skins of animals, and these had not yet been granted to man for food. Worship of this kind must have been ordained by God, and was therefore binding

on Cain. If it was so, then his offering of the fruits of the ground must have been a trespass of the known will of God. Why ask his brother for an offering when the fruits of his tillage were as good, and his own? In the Epistle to the Hebrews we are told that it was by faith that Abel offered a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, in whom there was no faith in God, but a haughty self-will. To the gifts of the brothers God bare witness, making it clear by His treatment of them that Abel was righteous. What followed was wrath in Cain's soul, no doubt against God, but also against his brother, set above him by God.

The story is very sad, as all stories are which tell of the progress of sin in any soul. Selfishness and pride go first, and after that follow variance, dislike, envy, jealousy, anger, malice, hatred, treachery, cruelty, murder, horror, and despair. A dreadful pageant indeed, or triumph of devils, to pass as it does through so many souls in a world made by God. Surely we who have heard of it, or even seen some part of it passing near us, need not be warned against allowing it to make its way through our souls. God forbid, each man says, a Cain I could never be. Not perhaps, St. John would answer, in all that Cain did. You would not slay your brother, yet you may be like Cain in feeling, in imagination, in wish. From the sin of Cain we surely are in God's sight sometimes not very far. For "*he that*

hateth his brother is a murderer," and, as St. John uses words, all are under that judgment who wish anything but good to their neighbour. To be glad in his harm is to bear the mark of the evil one. For hatred is the seal of Satan, as love is the seal of God.

The Apostle points out what it was that made the sin of Cain so heinous. He slew Abel "*because his works were evil and his brother's righteous.*" There are hatreds felt, for which there may be large excuse; for there are deeds wrought in the world which may well fill the soul with a wrath, justly rising to any point short of malignant hate. Against them we do well to be angry. But the rage of Cain was not against the evil, but against the good which he saw in Abel. Deeper than this into sin man cannot go, and yet akin to it is the envy and jealousy, the grieving at the good of our neighbour, which few seem to mark as wrong. Even when wrath is just, and dislike righteous, let us not forget what evil things God sees in ourselves, and how, withal, He deals with us. If therefore we have enemies who hate us, and have hurt us, let us not, if they fall into our power, avenge ourselves on them; neither let us be sad or vexed, as Jonah was, if standing aside to let the wrath of God take its proper course with our adversary, we see, instead of the ruin we thought would overtake him, God suffering long with him, and even forgiving him his sin against us.

CHAP. III. VV. 13, 14.

Marvel not, brethren, if the world hateth you. We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brethren. He that loveth not abideth in death.

The hate of Cain, shown in the murder of his blameless brother, leads St. John to think of the dislike of the world to the children of God. They too are hated as Abel was and for the same cause. It might have been thought that the righteous man hurting no one, trying to do some good to all, would be loved by all. But it is not so, saith St. John, speaking too strongly, as at first it seems. The world hates all such. No doubt the world, as St. John knew it, was worse than it is now, for wherever the Gospel has come it has done some good, even to those who do not believe it, making men less cruel, though not less bitter. For it is still true that the world, in feeling at any rate, is not merely unfriendly to real Christianity, it strongly dislikes it. It does not now as of old kill and burn Christians, but it meets them with a chilling coldness, or with ridicule, or scornful pity. If Christian men fail in some good work they have tried to do, the world mocks them; or if they fall into any sin, the world scarce tries to hide its joy. Why is this? Christians say, for we certainly do no harm to these men.

"*Marvel not,*" answers St. John, it was so from the first, and it must always be so. Our Lord leads us to look for nothing else. "Ye," saith He, "shall be hated of all men for My name's sake."[1] The world, He also says, must hate His disciples, "because they are not of the world," and St. Paul tells us that "if any man will live godly in Christ Jesus he must suffer persecution" of some kind.[2] Our Lord even counts those blessed who thus suffer, and utters a woe upon those of whom all men speak well. It was of this that He was thinking when He said that He had "not come to send peace on earth but a sword."[3] This enmity is seen most clearly in the treatment of Christ by the world. His followers are often foolish, and by the sinful tempers which cleave to them may give good cause for dislike. It was not so with Christ, yet no man was so bitterly disliked as He was.

It must then be that the world shall hate the child of God if he be true to his Master. Selfishness and unselfishness cannot feel or work together. And this dislike is deepened by the blame which the conscience lays on selfishness; for the conscience is not quite dead in any man. It is deepened too by the uneasiness that springs from feeling that the Christian is perhaps right, as well as by the restraint and unspoken reproof which his presence brings with it. There comes in also, though the world

[1] Matt. X. 22. [2] 2 Tim. III. 12. [3] Matt. X. 34.

would deny it, the bitterness of envy towards those who have hope after death, all leading to the wish to put an end to Christianity, if not by force, then by eager words or writings,—a wish that shows, by the passion that is in it, the beginning of a hate, which would destroy the harmless peace of a brother man, and robbing him of all his wealth of faith and hope, for which he who takes it has no use, would leave him by the wayside naked and half dead. Of this, in the forms which belong to our age, all Christians know something, and often with keen sorrow. But they cannot help giving cause for such dislike. "If they were of the world, the world would love its own." They must "live godly in Christ Jesus." They cannot hide their hope in God. But part of their goodness will be to return "not evil for evil, or railing for railing, but contrariwise blessing."

There is, however, one great danger which the Christian here runs. It is to take for granted that if he be disliked it must be for his godliness, and that it is as a Christian that he is suffering. He should never be sure of this. Strangely mixed sometimes with Christian principle is a spiritual vanity, a Pharisaic pride, a captious judging and fault-finding and law-making, which the world is perfectly right in disliking. To those faults St. Peter would add, as a possible cause of enmity to Christians, a meddling by them with other men's matters;

and he shows how much evil he had seen this do, by ranking it as a sin alongside of murder and theft.[1] This risk would seem to be as great as that of a man hiding somewhat of his Christianity for the sake of giving none offence; though on that side the temptation is sometimes very great, since to be hated is most painful to a gentle spirit.

We can see that at this point two thoughts were in the mind of St. John. The first, that if the world hates and kills, God on the other side loves and gives life; and the second, that from the hatred of the world Christians have a refuge in the noble and tender love they have for each other. Out of these two thoughts we find him making for us another test, which, with his strong wish to save us from mistakes about ourselves, he will add to those already given. "*We know,*" he says, "*that we have passed from death into life, because we love the brethren.*" We may be sure that we really hold from God that gift of life, which may well make up to us for the deadly hatred of the world, if we have also that love for the brethren, which in its restful pleasantness far outweighs all that the friendship of the world could give us. For spiritual life never comes from God to any man without brotherly love along with it.

Hitherto St. John, when speaking of love, means chiefly that Godlike love which is called out by the

[1] 1 Peter IV. 15.

sight of pain, or misery, or want, or danger,—the love which is the most noble form of righteousness, which without fondness or liking may know nothing of its object, except that it is in need of help. It may be distastefulness itself that calls it out, as when a man banishes himself for ever from his fellows, that he may watch over and nurse a colony of lepers. Of that love much has already been said by St. John, and he will yet say more. It must reach out to all our brethren of mankind. To those who are of God and to those also who are of the world, to those even who hate and hurt us, to our enemies, for whom in their need we are to do what we can, feeding them in their hunger, in their thirst giving them drink. Here, however, those who are to be loved are so marked out as to narrow the sense of the word love to one only of its meanings. The Apostle here speaks of loving not one another, or our brethren, but "*the* Brethren"; a special title often given to Christians in the Acts of the Apostles, and by St. Paul. Here then our Christian brethren are meant, the children of our Father in heaven, and the love we are to bear to them, while it keeps all that belongs to Godlike love, is to partake of the pleasant fondness which the truest friends feel towards each other.

If then a man loves the brethren with such a love as this, he may know that he has passed out of death into life. Our Lord likewise says, "By this

shall men know that ye are My disciples if ye have love one to another." The words of St. John here press upon us more closely than those of Christ. By love to each other, Christ says, you can show to the world that you are Christians. By this love, the Apostle says, you can make that clear to yourselves.

This is one of the strong sayings of St. John which we must not rashly use. For there are worldly people who are really fond of some Christians, and there are some Christians who are anything but fond of each other. Yet we cannot say that for this one reason the former have, and the latter have not, passed out of death into life. If all men were either utterly bad or thoroughly good, then every worldly man would hate every Christian and all Christians would love each other with a pure heart fervently. As it is, the love, or the dislike, which is felt for a Christian, may often have little or nothing to do with his Christianity. All then that the Apostle can here mean is, that we may take it as a clear token for good, if we are drawn to another by what is Christ-like in him: and that if we are not so drawn, we should fear that we are abiding in death. Love to the brethren is one of the signs of life, and the want of it is spiritual death. Brotherly love therefore will reach greater purity and strength, the stronger and the purer our spiritual life is.

But this love does not imply that we are to like,

or even understand, all and everything that we see in a brother Christian. We must all strive to be like Christ, but we cannot help all the while being also ourselves. The Holy Spirit, when through faith in Christ we become sons of God, does not take from us the old nature in so far as it is sinless, which (given by God to us, as to others severally as He will), draws us towards, or drives us from each man we meet, whether he belongs to the church or to the world. We may indeed, or must, because of this, feel ourselves sometimes very far apart, yet without sin, from a brother Christian, in many points of opinion or taste. But if we see him aiming to be righteous as God is righteous, then even though there be something in both his walk and his talk which are displeasing to us, we shall surely be more drawn to him by that true token of our kinship, than driven from him by the little things we do not like in him.

But this has not been in any age the feeling of the church on earth. Want of charity, bitterness and wrath, have made its many controversies a reproach. Variance and strife, and even hatred, have been more clearly seen in it than love. A cause indeed of shame. It will be a happy day, which surely will come at last, when Christians shall strongly feel the duty of keeping in view the image of God in a man, whenever it can be seen, and of hailing *that* as a mark of brotherhood, quite as clear

as sameness of creed. At any rate let us beware of withholding the name of Christian from the righteous man, who is not at one with us on some points far smaller than righteousness. We would fain make our bitterness of feeling towards him look well by dwelling on his errors, but in doing so we run the risk of fixing, to our own loss, the grounds on which we ourselves shall be judged. For "with what measure we mete it shall be measured to us again!" Better for us to consider the beam which may be in our own eye, and while we are doing so to carry with us the words of St. John, "*He that loveth not abideth in death!*"

Chap. III. v. 15.

Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer: and ye know that no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him.

The word death, with which the 14th verse ends, is used in a spiritual sense, and means here a real state of the soul; not its legal state as given up to die, but as actually undergoing that death which is the punishment of sin. When we speak of the soul as dead we mean that its state is like that of a dead body. St. Paul makes much use of this figure, teaching by means of it much that is true. But neither with him, or here, must the likeness

be pressed too far. That which, in this verse, the dead soul is thought of as having in common with the dead body, is moral numbness, or insensibility. It does not feel. The body when alive feels in every part of it, but this ceases with death. It is so with the soul also. St. John in the earlier part of this Epistle spoke of souls as in darkness, or as being blind. Here he uses a figure drawn not from the sense of sight but from that of touch. The soul whether blind or numb is in either case untouched, unmoved, by the realities around it. The same figure is used when we speak of a man as unfeeling, or hard hearted. He is one who is not pained by cruelty or moved to helpfulness by the misery beside him.

Under all figures of speech, error lurks, and therefore this figure of death, as applied to the soul, may be so far misleading. The dead body crumbles into dust, it ceases to be. The dead soul corrupts, and sinks into an ever deeper degradation; it falls down, as it were, into a pit that is bottomless, in which it goes on existing and falling. It is dead, and yet does not cease to be. Hence the depth in corruption to which it can go is not bounded by an end. When dead souls here on earth are so corrupt as to offend us, we bury them out of our sight in a jail or convict island. God, as we are told by Christ, does so too. They are cast from the presence of Him and the holy angels into outer dark-

ness.[1] They are left to insensibility and blindness of heart. The rare word, used by Christ to describe their burial place, is Gehenna—the name given to that dark valley, the graveyard of Jerusalem, whither also the offal of the city was thrown out, with all bodies that were vile; where the fire that burned these up was ever kindled, and the worm never ceased to gnaw all that was not fit to be sacrificed to God or used by man. A telling image indeed of the state of souls, which, having no love, abide in death. The soul, on the other hand, which has been made alive, has, belonging to its life, that quickness of feeling, which St. John calls love. Hate, as he uses the word, is, to begin with, the want of that feeling. The man who hates is unfeeling. He may not desire to hurt or make unhappy. It is enough if he is not moved to help, or to make happy. He need not kill his brother. St. John thinks him a dead soul if he takes no pains to keep his brother alive. We may not therefore say that we do not hate, if we know that we are not seeking our brother's good, or are careless about his happiness. The easy leaving to themselves of those about us often hurts them, causing bitter griefs: sometimes it even kills. For to do nothing is often the worst cruelty to those who see us able to help. We should be the murderers of a man sinking in a quicksand if we sat within reach of

[1] Mark VIII. 38.

him on a rock, and quietly looked on till he sank out of sight. But we do sit quietly in sight of souls, slowly drawn down into hopelessness, whom we could, at any rate, try to save. The worst hurting and killing is not of the body. The feelings can be wounded, and the heart broken. The character can be ruined. Worst of all the soul of a brother or sister can be cruelly murdered. Out of such deeds oftenest come the deepest tragedies: sin tempting to sin, unbelief teaching unbelief, hatred rousing hatred, and these when finished bringing forth death.

We see, then, what St. John means when he says "*Whosoever.*" Every man, though he holds to Christian worship and creeds, "*who hateth his brother is a murderer, and ye know*"—there can be no doubt about it—"*that no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him.*" If then a man, when misery shows itself to him, is annoyed, and wishes that no sufferer lived to ask his help, and break his selfish rest; if, thwarted in his aims, he feels that it would please him to see his rival laid where he could no more trouble him: that man, though he says no word and strikes no blow, stands in God's sight as if the blow had been struck. We know that our Lord, speaking of adultery, made it clear that the act of sin, and the looking for the purpose of desiring to sin, are of equal guilt. So it is here. The hater, the injurer, the destroyer in feeling or wish,

or by want of feeling or wish, is in the sight of God as if he had destroyed; for, but that he wanted place, or time, or power, or daring, he would have destroyed. It is so too, we would gladly believe, with what is furthest from hate—with loving-kindness, and help, and the hindering of wrong. Our Lord's praise of the poor widow with her two mites takes in, not only some small happiness in doing good to others, but also the hopeless longing of the many who see how great is the misery of man on the earth, and yet can do nothing, or what seems to them nothing, to help it.

The man, then, who loveth not abideth in death, and the man who hates hath not eternal life abiding in him. Is then that life, which, once given, is called eternal, really lost by him who in hatred goes only the length of not loving?[1] The words of St. John are that "eternal life does not abide in him." He tells us in other places of many good things that abide in the believer. Such as the word of God, the anointing of the Holy Spirit, the seed of God, the love of God; but this is the only place where life is said to abide in him. We pass (v. 14) "out of death into life," and one may "abide in death." No doubt it is the same truth in another form which is here before St. John. Spiritual life is a gift, but it is also a region. The region, be it remembered, which St. John thinks of as parted

[1] See Chap. V. v. 16.

from the region of spiritual death by the very same line which is drawn between love and hate. Into it the soul passes with or in Christ, and we abide in it while we abide in Him. Now in the 6th verse we are told that "whosoever abideth in Him cannot sin"; that is to say, as we saw, that while we abide in Him we cannot sin. But since hatred is a sin, and indeed, as St. John thinks, the root of all sin, the soul that hates is no longer abiding in Christ. Though it had passed into life, it has passed back into death, in which region it is now abiding.

But can souls that have thus died ever live again? No doubt they can, else would there be no place found for repentance in a back-sliding Christian. Still, this question is often most painfully asked by one who, having fallen from love into hate, feels from the gloom about him (and the gloom of hate is very dark) that he is abiding in death. He knows that this Apostle speaks of a brother sinning a sin unto death, for whom he will not say that request should be made. He knows that in the Epistle to the Hebrews there is a fallen believer set before us, whom it is not possible to renew to repentance. It seems then that a soul, once alive, may die a spiritual death from which there is no rising again. That this has ever happened we are not forced to believe. Our Lord says that the life He gives is eternal; that they who receive it shall never perish, and that none shall snatch them out of His hand

or out of the hand of His Father.[1] This may mean that none of them shall perish by being torn from His hold by the violence of such an one as Satan; but it is not said that they cannot tear themselves of their own will from His grasp, and afterwards keep themselves out of it, when He would lay hold on them again. Still, the words of our Lord leave us free to believe that, as a man, who had in his field a deep pit, would not only warn his children against it, but also set round it a fence so high with cruel spikes as that they could never climb over it to their death; so God, by putting round the sin unto death many dreadful words, has ever hindered the most foolish or wilful of His children from falling into it.

In what, moreover, that sin lies is left strangely vague, with the issue, no doubt foreseen, that many sins have been shunned by sorely tempted men, lest one of them should be the sin unto death. In this place St. John is speaking of a sin, than which, when it is full grown, none into which the Christian can fall seems to be more deadly. For bitter hatred, when above all it has to be shut up and nursed in the heart, sets itself against the strivings of the Spirit with the inner man towards repentance with a stubborn hardness; and there are those who, under the power of it, have wrought evil more cruel in the sight of God than that of Cain. But let no man

[1] John X. 28.

be hopeless, save he who being past feeling does not and cannot either despair or hope. It is life that is afraid of death; death is careless about having died. To fear greatly that we have come short for ever of the grace of life, shows us that we have not yet lost it. King David, in the matter of Uriah, was as bad as Cain, or worse, yet the Fifty-first Psalm shows to how true a repentance he could be renewed. Yet surely he was then near the point from which if a man looks back he sees the gates, by which he entered, to be shut and barred. Thanks be to God, the question with us sinners is, not what we have done, in act or in thought, but how do we now look on that which we did. "The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit, a broken and a contrite heart Thou, O Lord, wilt not despise."

Chap. III. v. 16.

Hereby know we love, because He laid down His life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.

The real sense of this verse and much of its force are lost in the A.V. by two words being put in, though none answer to them in the Greek, which reads simply "*Hereby know we love.*" St. John has said much about love, and made much of our loving. It is the chief sign of spiritual life. If we have no love we are abiding in spiritual death.

But he is clearly not sure that even yet we rightly understand what that love is of which he speaks. There are many who love, indeed, there are probably none who, in some sense of the word, do not love. But their love has often in it nothing of spiritual life. The word therefore leaves us in doubt of St. John's meaning. Yet the Greeks, in whose tongue he speaks, were better able than we are to discourse clearly of love, for they had three names for it. We have only one, and that we give to the most brutal of passions, as well as the most self-forgetting spirit of sacrifice.

But St. John felt that even the Greek word he uses might be misunderstood. Much that he wished to bring out in it had scarce been thought of before Christ. How then define it? for words of definition need themselves to be defined. When he would make clear what hatred is, he could show it us in Cain. But where was he to find one who had shown the love of which he was thinking? History tells us many stories of noble friendship—of Abraham, for example, when he gave up to Lot the well-watered plain of Jordan,—of Esau, less dignified and steadfast, but at times scarce less noble than his grandfather, as when, having his selfish brother at last in his power, he with a frank greatness forgave him,—of Jonathan too, in his affection for the man who was to supplant him; and the heart is stirred by the heroism of the three knights (as in

the old days they were called), who brought David water from the well at Bethlehem. Such men showed a high kind of love, and our Lord gladly acknowledged that such love was to be found among men. Such love, yet not the highest, for it rises only to this, that "a man will lay down his life for his friends."[1]

But St. John has already spoken of a still greater love (Chap. II. 10, III. 1), called by him the love of God. Of it there had been on earth only one perfect pattern, and it is of that St. John is now thinking. "*Hereby,*" he says, "*know we love, because He laid down His life for us.*" He does not name Christ, for He alone could be the "*He*" who thus died. He does not speak of sinners and enemies, as those for whom He died; it is enough to mark the greatness of that love to say, that it was for *us* that He laid down His life—for *us,* such as we know ourselves to be. St. Paul is full of the same truth. "God commendeth His love towards us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us."[2] Here then is the pattern of love, as St. John wishes us to understand the word. It need not have in it aught of fondness, or even of liking. In essence it is a principle, which often warms, when at its best, into a passionate eagerness to help at any cost those who are in want, or misery, or danger; the loving soul is straitened till its work for them is

[1] John XV. 13. [2] Rom. V. 8.

done. As a principle, it was not, before Christ, known in the world; though as a noble impulse, in which we see a survival of the image of God in man, there have been, and are, some driven by it to deeds of heroism, who in their cooler hours cared only for self, as when a boatman saves a shipwrecked crew, or a fireman searches through a burning house for a forgotten child: for the sailors and the child are to their saviours utter strangers. St. Paul thinks that "for good men some would even dare to die"; but of these it was not known that they were good. It was simply because they were human beings that men risked their lives for them. Let a very high place be given them for this; but would they, with much time to think about it, lay down their lives—would they even risk them—for enemies? Here the figure of Christ rises high above all, and it is He whom St. John calls on us to copy. It is when we have in us a mind like His that we are seen to be the children of God.

We cannot too firmly fix for ourselves what this higher love really is, and does. We all readily allow that it is right to be loving and kind; that if we see distress we should try to succour it, and give help in danger when we can. But we set ourselves bounds, and say there is a point beyond which no man can be asked to go. But Christ set Himself no such limit. There are those who speak of His condescension; but this is a displeas-

ing word, which no right-minded man could wish to be used of himself, far less of Christ. There is no downcome in doing that which is best, and the coming of Christ from heaven to earth to save us was the true outcome of all that He was, and also the truest mark of His greatness. For it belonged to such greatness as His, that He, the Most High and the Best, should, surpassing all others, lay down, with knowledge and forethought, His life for us, His creatures, miserable in our thanklessness and sin. How high is He in this above us—how high above all in this His greatness! We deny help to the miserable, and feel ourselves blameless when we can say that they brought their misery upon themselves. We are led on, in what little help we give, by thanks and praise. He was met only with scorn. We may do much under passing impulse. He did all for us with thoughtful purpose. We at best risk our life: He laid His down. We for those who welcome us: He for those who thrust Him away. Who of us ever flattered himself that he could follow Christ in this, calmly, thoughtfully, knowingly, to undertake years of sorrow, sure that at the end of them there was to be the most shameful, God-forsaken death, and all for those who had no love for Him, no gratitude, no sense even of the worth of what He was doing? Yet this is that which the love of Christ did for us, and it is this kind of love to which St. John calls us.

Clearly, however, he does not think that we shall reach the height of it. Christ laid down His life for us, but St. John does not here ask more of himself, or of us, than that we should lay down our lives for the brethren—for those towards whom, as fellow-Christians, we may well have some real affection. We cannot indeed ransom the souls of men; we cannot by any sacrifice save them from evils so great as those from which Christ saved us. The number of those whom we could by any means help is small, and the good we could do them trifling, when set beside the multitude that no man can number, who through Christ are good and happy, now and for ever. But there are many ways in which we may mortify ourselves for others; whereby, if we reach not any height to make us giddy, we may at least accustom ourselves to that readiness in self-denial, which some day may help us to feel with thankfulness that our love for the brethren is not altogether unlike Christ's love for us.

CHAP. III. vv. 17, 18.

But whoso hath the world's goods, and beholdeth his brother in need, and shutteth up his compassion from him, how doth the love of God abide in him? My little children, let us not love in word, neither with the tongue; but in deed and truth.

St. John would not have us wait for any very wide opening in which to display the greatness of our brotherly love. We can, he thinks, find room enough for that in the narrow spaces of our every-day life. It often pleases us to think of ourselves as living in an unreal world, in which we do much that is good, making in it many noble sacrifices, and carrying out in it high principles. To do this is quite misleading, if we think thus to see ourselves as we really are. It is not likely that we should have been more wakeful than the three disciples who slept in Gethsemane, or that we would not have fled through the dark night when the Master was seized. St. Paul's dangerous journeyings would probably have wearied us, had we, instead of John Mark, been with him. We cannot be sure that we would have stayed still in Rome, to care for Paul the prisoner, when Demas forsook him; we would rather perhaps have gone with Crescens to Galatia. It costs the fancy nothing to give up

all, and to lay down life itself for the brethren. St. John knows this, and he therefore would draw us back from vain thoughts to the real world in which we are living. How do we act in it?

Now it is a world strange is this, as in so much else, that some of God's children in it have much, and some of them very little, of what are called its "*goods*." That word takes in all that goes to uphold the world's life, such as power, or money, or cleverness. Some have them, while others are poor, or stupid, or handless, and yet are brethren in Christ. Such people meet together in every village, in every church, so that the man with the world's goods has always close to him the brother who has them not, and who is poor perhaps in this also, that he has nothing about him to draw us to him, only he is in want. To give him help will do no earthly good to the richer man, while to be enough it will need some sacrifice. How then do you, the Christian, who have this world's goods, treat this needy and tiresome brother who lives beside you? You pity him no doubt; this the Apostle takes for granted; for you have feelings given you to aid your principles, and your good nature, not dead, opens your heart. But is your selfishness, rising in alarm, able to shut it again? It will try to do so, for self is threatened whenever the heart is opened. If it is able to close it, wise reasons will be given. For is it not true that if we give once we must go

on giving? does not giving foster sloth and break down that fine independence of spirit which the rich are bound to cherish in the poor, by teaching them to look for no help? If it be not alms that are needed, there are then found ready excuses, such as those with which the priest and the Levite satisfied themselves as they went on their way up the steep road to Jerusalem. Some reason, short cloak though it be to cover the shame of selfishness, is readily found for leaving the needy man unhelped.

Not that it is wrong to wait a little that we may think over, and search into, the case of the poor. The word here is "*beholdeth*" and not merely "*seeth*" as by a hasty glance. It means that there is a full knowledge of the brother's need. But in fact, the time, and the trouble, and thought, to be spent in getting such knowledge, are the very things which the rich in the world's goods are often least willing to give to the poor man. To throw some small money to him is often found the easiest way of shutting the heart against his pitiful wants. It may indeed be said to be always wrong to give a very small sum to one who asks our aid. It is either too much, or too little to give. Too much, if the man is not in real need, and too little if he is. For if the want be real, he has a claim on our careful thought and wise sympathy, as well as on our purse, and this surely of a very strong kind, if he be of the household of faith. If we do not feel this and act

forthwith on the feeling, St. John is sure that no Godlike love is abiding in us. We may be loving our brother in word and tongue, and fancy ourselves ready to lay down our lives for him, but all is worse than vain, if we are not loving him in deed and in truth. No doubt we may sometimes see a man rising in rare deeds of unselfishness above his daily self, but clearly St. John doubts whether such strange sacrifices are not made rather to self than to our brother. There is no principle in them. The feeling which urges a great sacrifice for the brethren will surely, if there be any truth in it, lead us to feel for their smaller wants.

It is no unworthy use of great motives which sets them to humble work. A man may live a long life, and not once be called on to use his principles on a grand scale. There is no more stirring passage in all that St. Paul has written than that in which (1 Cor. xv. 54-58) he speaks of the Christian's triumph over death. "Therefore," he says, "be ye stedfast, unmoveable, abounding in the work of the Lord." Moved by this voice, as of a trumpet, what work of the Lord are Christians to undertake? That to which St. Paul sets them at once is simply to make weekly gatherings for the poor saints in Jerusalem (1 Cor. xvi. 1). It is by many small, every-day acts of love that we chiefly add to the real happiness of others.

St. John speaks to his children about this

matter with much sweetness. He had called them "*brethren*" (v. 13) when he thought of them as feeling the hatred of the world; here they are his "*children*," fresh and tender of heart. But let them not think that enough. To feel, and not to act on the feeling, is to be as one that beateth the air. Neither let them think that easily spoken words of love are worth much, if words be all. It is a wicked mockery to say to "the brother or sister who is naked, and in want of daily food, be ye warmed and filled," if we, not being ourselves in equal want, let them go unclad and hungry. The question ever is not what do you feel, or what do you say, but what is it you do? God did not limit Himself to words. Christ did not waste His time on earth in speaking of what He felt for us. He laid down His life for us.

Chap. III. vv. 19-21.

Hereby shall we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our heart before Him, whereinsoever our heart condemn us; because God is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things. Beloved, if our heart condemn us not, we have boldness toward God.

St. John now goes on to speak of the good which comes to ourselves from loving our brother as God loved us. We shall thereby "*know that we are of*

the truth," and so, "*whereinsoever our heart condemn us*," be able to "*assure it before God*." "Truth" is a word often used by St. John, but, as we have seen, not quite in the sense we are wont to give it. In the prayer of our Lord, on the night in which He was betrayed, He asks for His disciples that they may be consecrated or "set apart in the truth." He clearly thinks of truth as a place or region in which the soul may dwell. It is the region of reality, in which things stand out as they are, and not as elsewhere they seem. It is a region opened to us chiefly in the Word of God, and the realities in it are beheld with the eye of faith. Many of the things seen there are the same which, with the eye of sense, we see here; but their values are greatly changed. What we thought much of is there seen to be worthless, what many here seek for as a prize, there is left unheeded. Besides, there are many things which are to be seen only in this region. It is one of the most hurtful evils which have followed our sin, that here in this world men do not see things as they really are. Satan, the father of lies, and the prince of this world, rules chiefly by cheating those who are his, casting a glamour over them, so that things are false before their sight. The fleeting and the worthless, the vain, and even the harmful seem abiding, full of good, worthy of being sought. So that men walk in a vain show. "They spend money for that which

is not bread, and their labour for that which satisfieth not." The old fable, repeated in the folk-lore of so many nations of selling the soul to a demon for money, which soon turns to withered leaves, bears witness to the knowledge mankind has ever had of this fact.

The same idea has already been set forth by St. John under the figure of darkness, in which the soul lives outside of the light in which God is, along with those who, like the Apostle, are in fellowship with Him, all seeing the same things. To be "of the truth" then is one of the many phrases which set forth the great change from which spring repentance and Godlike love. For clearly those who see things as they are will not feel about them as those do who see things as they are not. They will grieve over things they did when misled in the darkness, and they will love as beautiful that which to them had once neither form nor comeliness. We can from afar see that a man is blind from the vagueness of his gait, and the false steps he makes, and it is so with the spiritually blind also. Of another we may be sure that he has clear sight, because he shuns all stumbling blocks, and goes straight through openings. It is a way of judging like this which St. John wishes us to use. We all are pleased to think that we are in the light, or of the truth, or, in other words, wise. But when we see so many stumbling through life, and bethink ourselves

of what we once suffered in the miry clay, if not in the horrible pit, we may doubt if we are even yet seeing clearly, or if we are of the truth. Again therefore the Apostle would have us use a sure test. We shall see, we shall know, that we are of the truth, or in the light, if it be so that we are following the simple law of loving, not in word or in tongue, but in deed and truth. For every one that is in the light sees that this is the only right path through life: all other paths leading either no where or to the pit.

St. John has already said much (in Chap. II. vv. 9-11) to show us, that if we follow this law of love we make no mistakes, we avoid failure, we overcome difficulties, we suffer from no disappointments. We see clearly that we have not been going astray. Our actions and lives are at one with all that is real. Whereas the man who hates, or does not love, finds himself in the end entangled in a maze of evil.

But St. John goes further. God's word is truth, for it sets forth the reality of things. Christ also is the truth, for His life on earth shows what a man's life is when it is at one with things, not as they seem, or as for a time they may be, but as they eternally are. The believer therefore in God's word and in Christ is in the light, or of the truth. But when God at the first gave life to man, along with that life was also a light (John I. 4), which should always show him the truth, and keep him from

going wrong in his judgments about the real and the unreal. This is what St. John here calls the heart, which in its healthy state does much the same work as the conscience.

But in the mind of every man who knows that God is real and near, the question arises, Are the judgments of conscience the same as the judgments of God? Is He thinking of us as we are thinking of ourselves? Is He seeing us as we see ourselves? Many of God's dealings with men lead to the question, "Have I cleansed my heart in vain and washed my hands in innocency?" If our conscience praises us, is God perhaps not praising us? Or, on the other hand, "*whereinsoever our heart condemn us*," is God also condemning us?

The Apostle is much afraid that we may, by such doubt, get rid of the sense of sin (Chap. 1. 6-10). There can indeed be no greater evil than for a man to think that God's view of right and wrong is not the same as his own, that God can lower it perhaps in favour of His children, and make that right in them which seems wrong to us. Such a point must not be left in doubt. But if we are sure that we are of the truth, then are we also sure that we are judging about right and wrong as He judges. And this certainty, as St. John has pointed out, comes to us not through deep thinking, but in the carrying out in daily life of all that love can do for the happiness and well-being of our brethren. It is thus that

we come to know that we are of the truth, and thus to assure our consciences. We cease to doubt them. We find that in following them in these works of love they lead us to happy issues, which fill and satisfy our whole nature; under their guidance we find our way a way of pleasantness, and our path, a path of peace.

Our belief in this is strengthened by seeing that in this path of loving kindness and tender mercy we are following in the footsteps of God Himself, who is indeed "greater than our heart, and knoweth all things." For in unselfish love how much greater is He than we are, even when our hearts are at their best. How far does He go beyond all that our consciences tell us of duty. Our furthest, in trusting or obeying that law of love which conscience laid upon us, had been that perhaps we might die for a good man, or lay down our life for a friend, but "God has commended His love towards us in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us." Our heart therefore must be right when it condemns us, and gives us remorse, for not making for another such sacrifices as are asked of us by his want. Besides, God is not only greater than our heart, He also knoweth all things. His vision therefore of truth, or of the reality of things, is far keener and wider than ours. Since then He spared not His own Son for our help, He clearly saw that it belongeth to the perfect working of the eternal order

that no sacrifice can be made by any one that is too great, if it be for the real good of others. We thus see how our hearts are confirmed, or assured, when we look at what is highest and greatest in God, and take into account the width of His knowledge.

It would be a mistake to think that St. John is speaking here of those earlier stages of the soul's life, when its chief longing is to reach some undoubted sense of the willingness of God to pardon sinners. The doubts, which he here wishes to meet, are those which arise sooner or later in the believer's mind about what he should do, or not do—whether he can trust his conscience as a safe guide to what pleases God, his chief danger lying in doubting his conscience when it condemns him; for it is not so great an evil if he doubts it when it praises him.

The heart has been spoken of, as if St. John thought of it as little else than the conscience. But though they seem in his mind to be much the same, still the two words do not mean quite the same thing. For the heart, when it is pure, is more nice and fine in its judgments than the conscience is, and is therefore needed to weigh those finer questions which St. John's high sense of duty presses upon us. Not to love our neighbour as well as we love ourselves, and therefore to enrich ourselves by his loss, or to take pleasure out of his pain, is sin in the sight of conscience, who calls it injustice or iniquity. But not to love our neighbour as Christ loved us is not, in

the usual sense of the word, wrong. It is not looked for in us by either our neighbour or our conscience. It is here that the heart comes in, which, loving Christ and longing to be like Him, sees in this a failure, not so much in duty, as in aspiration—sees in it rather the loss of the prize of our high calling, than an iniquity to be punished by the judge. It is then in sorrow, rather than in anger, that the heart judges the believer, who fails himself to exercise that Divine love to which in Christ he owes so much. But that sorrow of the heart is not really weaker than the wrath of the conscience. Indeed, when it is truly felt, no power of the adversary can resist it.

But St. John is glad to believe that their hearts do not always condemn those whom he calls his *beloved*. They fail, but not always. They have sometimes risen to the height of Christian love, making a painful sacrifice for others, and for this their hearts praise them. In that case let them be sure that God also was pleased. We are indeed happy when we know before God that we are at one with Him in thinking well of ourselves; when as to some duty we can say to Him, "I have cleansed my hands in innocency." Then can we look at Him without fear or any doubt, not shrinking with pain from His eye, but having boldness in drawing near to Him. To do this we must be listening to the testimony of a good conscience. A once pardoned man, aware that he is willingly going on in the

offence for which he had sought pardon, could not on any plea draw near with honest trust to the Being who had pardoned him. No part of the past or present work of Christ can be thought of as covering the heart that is regarding iniquity and going on in sin. Such an one God cannot pardon, if he dared to use before Him the name of Christ.

Chap. III. vv. 22, 23.

And whatsoever we ask, we receive of Him, because we keep His commandments, and do the things that are pleasing in His sight. And this is His commandment, that we should believe in the name of His Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, even as He gave us commandment.

St. John here tells us what it is not easy to believe. He says that if we are of the truth "*whatsoever we ask we receive of God.*" Our Lord also, as we know, says so more than once; adding, however, conditions like those we find here. But Christians ask many things of God which He does not give them. This comes, they are wont to say, from their not asking with enough of faith. And that is true, if the faith be not in ourselves but in God. For to believe, or to have faith, is nothing else than to be of the truth, or in the light, seeing the realities which God sees, and as He sees them. Seeing, among other things, God ready for Christ's sake to

give us the best of gifts; but seeing also what things are best, which, because they are the best, He is ready to give; God and the believer both seeing things in their true character, so that what we, if we are in the light, wish to get, is the very same which God wishes to give. It is when the soul is not of the truth, or in the light, when it is in the darkness or twilight, that it fails to see what is really good, and mistaking for it what is really evil, prays for what God out of love cannot bestow. What we pray for, when we really pray, and do not merely say our prayers, is that which we wish we had; or, in other words, that which, if we could, we would take for ourselves, but which we see we can get only by asking God for it. But if, being in the light, we are seeing things as God sees them, we would no more wish for, and ask from Him, than we would take, or do, anything that was not pleasing in His sight. For to all who are in the light, as God is in the light, the same things are pleasing to them and to God. Therefore, since they will certainly ask for nothing which does not please them, they will ask nothing which God will not give.

Our prayers are not always, perhaps not often, of this kind, and it is therefore that they are not always granted. We fail to see things as they are, and as God knows them to be. In the early dawn of our spiritual day we see things dimly. A serpent

we take to be a fish, or a stone to be bread. A clearer light, or in other words a larger faith, will show us that our prayers have often been blindly foolish, and how it was the love of God, our wise Father, that did not grant them.

Thus we see how it is that the man of faith, who is in true fellowship with God, wishes as well as does, those things only which are pleasing in His sight, and how therefore, if he is keeping all God's commandments, he may believe that God will meet all his wishes, and answer all his prayers. For what he wishes God also is wishing. When therefore St. John says that "*whatsoever we ask we receive of Him, because we keep His commandments, and do the things that are pleasing in His sight,*" he does not mean that God, in answering our prayers, rewards the merit of our obedience. He wishes simply to make plain the fact that the man who loves his brethren, and thus is clearly of the truth, and in the light, gets from God everything that he asks from Him. The chief word is "whatsoever," and the largeness of the "whatsoever" is bounded by the man's sympathy with God. For it does not follow that though the being acquitted by our heart gives us boldness towards God, this means that we are in perfect sympathy with all that is felt by God. For "He is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things." His knowledge is greater, and greater also is, if we may

so speak, His sense of duty, or of what should be wished or done: so that to be in fullest sympathy with Him our hearts must be trained and taught. They must become able to feel the claims of a righteousness more noble than any they have as yet known. Until this is reached they are not fully of the truth, not in perfect fellowship with God, not sure to wish for those things only which He will certainly give them.

Now this great lesson, needed no doubt by the angels, as well as by man even in his unfallen state, is taught us by Jesus Christ, who by His life on earth, and His death, is to us "the truth," so that we, thinking over what He was and did, as well as what He was not, and did not, come to see what is the perfect order of the universe, and what God is. In Him too is opened to us the great secret of God,—the perfect rule which His Son followed, and which we too must follow, if our lives, with all their wishes and doings, are to fit in with the truth. But because self-love, with all its wishes and doings, does not fit in with the truth, we must meanwhile force ourselves to do many things which we would rather not do, we must forget and deny ourselves, making daily sacrifices of self for the good of our neighbour. As St. John puts it, "*we must believe in the name of His Son Jesus Christ, and love one another.*" Or, in other words, we must see that Jesus Christ, who

is the truth, faithfully sets forth, by the manner of His life and death, those realities of the universe with which human nature has anything to do: and in our fellow-men the field in which it is our part to carry out in act the great law of love, which we see, when beholding the glory of Christ, to be that which gives order, and firmness, and strength, to all things great or small which anywhere have being.

To believe in the name of Christ, and to love one another, St. John sets before us as a commandment of God. Now we have already seen that one view which we may take of the commandments of God is, that they are statements to us of facts known to God, but not to us at all, or not so clearly as to Him. They are part of His revelation to us of the truth. Some of them can be nothing else but this, and it is so here. God in His love wishes us, and we ourselves wish, to reach the point where His will and our will are to be at one: when we shall be in true fellowship with Him, seeing all things, and feeling about them, as He sees and feels. How then are we to make our way up to this point? Now, as an Alpine climber finds out the nature of the ground on a distant mountain side by scanning through a glass the movements of a man who is scaling it, and catches some knowledge of the principles which guided him in choosing the path, which is seen to have led him safely to the point

he reached; so may we, by narrowly watching the walk of Christ on earth up to the height on which He now stands, not only find out much of the otherwise unknowable realities of the spiritual world; but clearly see also that the great rule, which He followed, was always to keep away from the side of selfishness, and to keep as near as could be to the side of love to others and forgetfulness of self. So we, if we wish to know enough of the realities of the spiritual world as to make our way among them to a place beside the throne of God, must note carefully what were the places of Christ's feet while He was within our sight, and take as ours the rule which we see ever guided Him; or, in other words, we must obey the wise and loving commandment of God, to "believe in the name of His Son Jesus Christ, and love one another."

To believe in Jesus Christ is indeed the only way whereby we can know the truth about God, or the reality of anything in the spiritual world: the only way also to bring ourselves into harmony with that world: and further, to love our brethren is also the only way whereby, being through Christ at first brought into that harmony, we can as it were keep ourselves in tune with it. These truths, therefore, given to us in the form of a command, are really statements, made to us by God, of facts of highest value to us; but which, apart from His revelation, we could never have known.

This view must be taken here. For a command, while it may give courage to a humble spirit to believe or to love, when if unbidden it must have lacked boldness for either, cannot by any means force a man to believe or to love. For faith and love are free. Our own will, however strongly moved, is powerless against the heart and the understanding. In this consists the liberty of our spirits from the bondage which force may lay on our bodies. Violence may bring the body of a man to obey any law; but over the affections and beliefs not the law of love itself, or any of the commandments which are summed up in it, have power by themselves. No man ever was, or ever will be, forced, by reward or punishment, or even by a sense of justice, to believe or to love. This holds true, even if we take love, unwarmed by passion, simply as the recognition of the principle that unselfishness is the true rule of life. For to recognize a principle is to believe in it. The word "commandment," therefore, here must mean the putting forth of influences powerful enough to persuade us to believe in the name of Christ, and to love one another. Such a sense is often given to the word. We speak of a man commanding assent, or admiration, or confidence, or respect, or affection. And it is this which God has done; leaving nothing undone, for us at least, which could draw us towards faith in Christ and love to each other.

By this faith in Christ we must be careful to understand not a mere holding to the truth that He lived and died, or to the words which portray His character and work. Really to believe in Him means that we are in sympathy with His character, and have a loving sense of the glory of it, as the best and most noble, so that to reach some likeness to it seems to us the highest good. To bring us to this state of heart is St. John's aim when he uses the words with which he here names our Saviour as "*His Son Jesus Christ,*" for each of them calls up in us, as we have already seen, adoring thoughts of Him. If we are not utterly to fail in reaching this living faith, our own characters must have become somewhat like that of Christ, otherwise there can be no sympathy with Him, and, therefore, no knowledge of Him. We must then be able to love one another; for that love is indeed the chief characteristic of Christ, so that brotherly love leads to the true knowledge of Him, even as knowledge of Him leads to brotherly love. It is this process of action and reaction which carries on the ripening of spiritual life in each Christian. As we grow in this grace of brotherly love we grow in the knowledge of Jesus Christ: and as "in a glass we thus behold the glory of the Lord, we are changed into the same image, from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord."[1] It is to this work of the

[1] 2 Cor. III. 18.

Holy Spirit, as the strongest of all in persuading and enabling us to believe in Christ, and to love each other, that St. John will soon turn.

Chap. III. v. 24 (a).

And he that keepeth His commandments abideth in Him, and He in him.

St. John is here recalling the words of his Master when He said, "If a man love Me he will keep My word and My Father will love him, and We will come unto him and make Our abode with him."[1] By this abiding of the soul in God, and of God in the soul, we see that something wonderful and very good for us is meant. Our Lord and His Apostle speak of spiritual things, as they must always be spoken of, by means of a figure drawn from carnal things. Our bodies abide in a place, but our thoughts and feelings are not so bound. They are free from the limits of space and time, going anywhere into the ages past or to come, however far away. Still they have a region in which they abide; an atmosphere, which is ever around them, as of gladness or of sadness, or eager wakefulness, or of heavy dulness, or, as the Apostle has shown, of truth or falsity.

Now we have been told that they who keep the commandments of God are of the truth: they are

[1] John XIV. 23.

in the light as God is in the light, and in that light they see God. They see Him filling the whole region of truth or reality, nay, as being, if we may so speak, that region itself. He is more real to them than aught else. For all that is real is He. Apart from Him nothing is real, so that to know Him is to know the truth, that is, to know all that is and ever must be; for all else is fleeting, and must pass away. God thus is to the living and healthy soul, that in which it lives. To be in Him is life, to be banished from Him is death, and so to abide in Him is to go on seeing, and feeling, and acting as a living soul.

This is what St. John means by abiding in God; it is more than to believe in Him, or to be raised for a little while into some clear view of His being and character. It is to keep at that height without coming down from it. It is to go on in our way of thinking and feeling, all the while beholding Him who is light, yet invisible, save in that which shines in His light. Beholding too all the realities, that are seen in Him to be realities, and thus to be so moved as to act in harmony with them, taking such account of them as never to jar against any of them, but to go only where they open a clear path. It is God, as we have been told, who enables us to see these realities. He has "by diverse portions, and in diverse manners," shown them to us. They are the facts, not otherwise seen by us, which

we have come to know through conscience as a moral sense, and by His word, but especially in His Son Jesus Christ, as He was seen and beheld and touched by the Apostles. They have declared them, in declaring Him to us, thus giving us a knowledge, which puts us in fellowship with God, and rules our hearts and lives. For each fact, which goes to make up the sum of that knowledge, acts the part of a command; each of them, to give it weight, carrying this with it, that some doings tend to life, with all of joy, and rest, and peace which go along with life; and others to death, with its diverse forms of misery. For as outside of God is spiritual death, so, as the Apostle puts it here, "*He that keepeth the commandments of God abideth in Him*," and, therefore, in spiritual life. "This *do* and thou shalt live," saith Christ, not for the doing, but in the doing. It is also, as we have seen in Chap. II., by the keeping of those commandments that we may know that we really are in God. It is easy for our feelings to lead us into error about this, but our daily life will bear a true witness as to whether we are under the sway of God. Thus then St. John has taught us, that if we abide in the commandments of God we abide at the same time in truth, in light, in life, and in God.

But we not only abide in God, He also abides in us. Our Lord, speaking to Nicodemus, likened the Holy Spirit in His working to the wind that

bloweth.[1] This figure we may take for further use. We abide in the air that is around us. We live in it. Out of it is death. But that we may live, it must also abide in us, for unless it makes its way into us, it is useless to abide in it. We must breathe it or we die. So is it with God. We must not only know that He is everywhere about us, and that He is the source of life; we must take Him into our heart, that He may abide there, and thence send forth His life-giving power. So is it with all knowledge. It must be so taken in by us as to become part of ourselves, and not lie, remembered only in the word-wrappings in which it comes to us. It is so then not only with God, but with Christ, with sin, with holiness, with eternity. These must become realities, abiding within us, under the power of which, thought and feeling and life change daily from what they were, towards what they are one day to be, when old things have passed away and all things have become new.

[1] John III 8.

CHAP. III. v. 24 (b) AND IV. vv. 1-3.

And hereby we know that He abideth in us, by the Spirit which He gave us. Beloved, believe not every spirit, but prove the spirits, whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world. Hereby know ye the Spirit of God: every spirit which confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God: and every spirit which confesseth not Jesus is not of God: and this is the spirit of the antichrist, whereof ye have heard that it cometh; and now it is in the world already.

The last words of the third chapter are more closely joined with those that come after than with those that go before them, while, at the same time, they are a link between the two. St. John has spoken of God abiding in us. Does He really so abide? No question can be more weighty than this. Many tests have been already given, after using which we may answer it. But it may often help us to have another. "*Hereby then we know that He abideth in us by the Spirit which He gave us.*"

St. John may have so very carefully guarded us against false views of ourselves, because of what he knew of himself. He, a Boanerges, a son of thunder, a man of passionate feeling, knew well the strength and weakness of such a nature, and

the risk of trusting to feelings, as if from them could be got any sure sign of the abiding state of the soul. Hence it is that we have him again and again urging on us the need of hard, unwearied searching and trying of ourselves. What we have to ask ourselves is not what it is we think, or suppose, or feel, but what is it we do? How do we walk? of what kind are the daily acts of our lives? or, if we take feeling into our reckoning, do we make sure of its worth by seeing that it works itself out in some worthy deed?

But here a test of quite another kind is given to us. Was there, we are to ask, a time well remembered in the past when God gave us His Spirit? Now, we may think this a test that can do little towards the end St. John has in view; for we know how easily one may think, and even be sure, that God has bestowed on him this gift, and yet be quite wrong, mistaking what came out of his own heart, or from an evil spirit, for the work of the Spirit of God. Those whose feelings are easily moved are often found to fall into a like mistake about the new life they think to be theirs. May it not therefore be that St. John is here speaking of those gifts of the Spirit which were openly bestowed on the earlier Christians, who are spoken of as receiving the Holy Ghost (Acts x. 47), and as being thus proved worthy of baptism? To be able, then, to look back on a day when, by the laying on of the apostles' hands,

these gifts became his, may have been thought by a man a good reason for believing that God was abiding in him. But it is clear that these gifts did not always prove any abiding change. St. Paul was not without doubt of them, as we learn from his First Epistle to the Corinthians. Rightly used, they might do great good; yet he who had them might be nothing better than "sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal."[1] It would not, then, be safe to use such a test of a man's Christianity. But, further, it would seem that, when St. John wrote this Epistle, these gifts had for the most part ceased, as St. Paul indeed had foretold. Those who had them at one time could not always use them. Trophemus was left by St. Paul sick at Miletus, and St. John, as we have seen, when he tells his children that the anointing of the Spirit still abides, seems to imply that the signs of His indwelling were no longer the same as in the earlier days of the church. Still it is clear that one gift of the Spirit was still not unknown. Revelations as from God were still uttered; but, since St. John goes on at once to say that such utterances may be prompted by the very spirit of Antichrist, he could not mean that they could now be used as a proof that God was abiding in any man.

But there is a proof of the anointing of the Holy Spirit which is to be found, not in the gifts, but

[1] 1 Cor. XIII. 1.

in the graces, which He ever bestows. The Christian, whose these are, may well be sure that God is in him of a truth. Whence the change in this inner life, if not from the indwelling of God? Whence the new feelings and longings? whence the brotherly love, the openness of heart, the self-denial, the sacrifices readily made to help others? He knew that these must be from God working in him by His Spirit. For indeed, while there flow from the Gospel other influences, leading to faith in God and obedience to Him, that inner work of the Holy Spirit in the soul, which is made known and promised in it, is felt to be the greatest of them all, giving indeed to the others their only real strength. If, then, we can fairly believe that our inner and outer lives can bear the tests which the Apostle has already given, they certainly prove that the Holy Spirit has been given us; and they do so the more strongly if, as often happens, the change from the old to the new life has been marked and sudden. We could not be what we are, but for the grace of God, who therefore certainly *gave us His Spirit*.

There is, however, another view of this passage, which is perhaps more thoroughly in keeping with the words used in it. They seem to tell us, if we look closely at them, that it is through the Holy Spirit given to us that we know that when we are keeping the commandments of God we are abiding

in Him. St. Paul states the same truth when he says that "the Spirit beareth witness," not "*to*" but along "*with*" our spirits, that we are the children of God.[1] He is not to us the only witness of this; our own spirits are thought of as bearing a witness to it, which He strengthens. So that it is not without the Holy Spirit that we can really know that God is abiding in us, while, at the same time, we are not to look on that as a witness from God, if there be wanting the witness borne by our spirits to the fact that we are keeping the commandments of God,—the Holy Spirit thus witnessing to our obedience, as to whether it be real or only seeming, thus hindering us from making an evil use of the Apostle's great test.

But further, in His office as one who comforts or strengthens, He helps an obedient, but ever self-blaming soul, to believe that his obedience, such as it is, proves God to be abiding in him. St. Paul speaks of our being "strengthened with all might by the Holy Spirit in the inner man," so as to apprehend the breadth and greatness of the Fatherly love of God.[2] This is needed by humble people. For a man may readily think his keeping of the commandments of God to be so far from what it might be, as that he dare not take it as a proof of his union to God. From this fear then the Holy Spirit comes to save him, by taking and showing

[1] Rom. VIII. 16. [2] Eph. III. 16.

to him of the things of Christ, in whom he is complete.

No sooner, however, has St. John said this, than with that strong dread of our going astray, which seems never to leave him, he bethinks himself that perhaps we may take for the witness of the Spirit of God that which is really the voice of the spirit of error, a spirit that is not of God. "*Believe not,*" therefore, he says, "*every spirit.*" Here St. John touches on things quite outside of our own knowledge, and therefore hard to be understood. His words seem to imply that there are many spirits, some of God, some not of God, who, through the voices of men, utter in the church what may seem to be the truth of God. Does St. John mean by these spirits the spirits of men—our own spirits—which as instruments are used, on the one hand by the Spirit of God, and on the other by the spirit of error? Any view but this would imply that the souls of men are haunted and moved, not only by many evil spirits or demons, but also that they are in like manner moved by many good spirits, who, apart from the Holy Spirit of God, urge towards what is true, as the others towards what is false. There may be such good beings. A service of this kind may belong to the ministry of angels. But we have no firm ground for believing that any spirit, other than the Holy Spirit of God, thus deals with us. It is therefore best to think of these

spirits, as St. John calls them, as those notable forms of influence which bear in on the souls of men, as if from without, and powerfully move them in feeling and thought. Believe not then—trust not, saith the Apostle, every impulse of this kind, as if it came from a source of truth. That which so moves you may be a spirit that is of God, but, remember, it may be a spirit of error.

It is well for us to keep in mind that we also may be thus misled. It often happens, even now, that wrong or foolish things are done, under the honest belief that they are prompted by God; and there are those who still give out that they have closely to do with a world of spirits, thus carrying on the unbroken line of false prophets, who, with more folly sometimes than knavery, have gone out into the world, under many names, but with like forms of deceit. Apart, however, from these, our own minds are often pierced by an inborne sense of seeming truth, which claims our trust. How are we to find out whether this is of God, or whether Satan has thus come to us in the guise of an angel of light? St. John gives us, in the 2nd and 3rd verses, a test whereby the truth or falsity of such impressions might in our case, at any rate, be known. Some who belonged to the churches to whom he was writing held that Jesus Christ had not come in the flesh, believing, as we can see, that God had made this known to them by His Spirit.

As we have already seen (Chap. II. v. 22), we cannot now find out the very form in which these false prophets, or Antichrists of St. John's time, put their error. It is enough to say that the Apostle clearly looked on their teaching as fitted to kill, not an outside branch, but the very root of Christian truth. We wonder indeed that errors so great should have risen so early in the church, forgetting that God has never flooded the minds of men, or the mind of any man, with truth; but that He gives it in diverse portions, as we are able to bear it. It belongs, except in rare cases, to His wise dealings with us, to leave the church and each soul in it, to struggle up to truth through a thicket of errors. Hence the many chapters of church history that are taken up with the story of the cutting down of these thickets, which were certainly most entangled at the point where the work began. Hence the thanks we owe to those great Fathers of the church, themselves not always free from error, who did for us, hundreds of years ago, work which has never needed to be done again, at least on the same scale. Hence the feeling, which we must not put aside, that part of our work, even now, is to do what we can to make clear openings round ourselves, through which the light of God's truth may shine more clearly into our souls, to the better ripening of what fruit they may be able to bear. Had this not been God's way with us, He Himself would have given

us a Confession of Faith, and made the Bible a hard clear-cut Creed, and a Dictionary of Duty. In coming to the knowledge of the truth, we, each one of us, must in this also be fellow-workers with God. It is only thus that we can make the truth our own, and feel that it has the value of that which we have ourselves grasped.

It is easy to see that the error of the Antichrists, of whom St. John is here thinking, may have had as its cause the very force of truth itself. This has indeed been the case with many errors. Under the old Paganism, the gods often came down to earth, and their doings when there were often very base. But the Jews, and the Christians after them, gave the God they worshipped a true reverence. From the height of His throne He can never come down. When therefore the man Jesus was set forth as the Son of God, we cannot wonder that there were those who felt about this truth as if it were only a new form of an old falsehood: or that when it was further said that His life was very humble, and His death shameful, they should have found that in aught so unworthy of God they could not believe. Jesus, the Man of Sorrows, who died on the Cross, could not be God. At the same time Jesus could not be left out of their religion, much of which was meaningless without Him. They therefore were bound to find a place among the truths they surely knew of God for what they knew of Jesus also, who

in some way had undoubtedly to do with God. This they seem to have done by saying that in no right sense of the word was Jesus—God. He suffered, not because He was made a curse for us, but because He, as a man, was, like other men, accursed. The Holy Spirit no doubt came to Him at His baptism, thus for a season filling Him with Divine wisdom and power. But this union to God came to an end before His death, as is shown by His bitter cry, when the Divine Being forsook Him. It might indeed be said that into the flesh, or human nature of Jesus, God for a time came; but this does not mean that Jesus was the heavenly Christ come in the flesh. It might even be allowed that for a season the flesh became the Word, but not that the Word became flesh. God was manifested through the flesh of Jesus, but not in the flesh.

In some such way as this did these Antichrists try to get rid of what was to them the God-degrading notion of the divinity of Jesus, believing that in this they were guided by nothing else than an impulse from on high. Trust not, St. John says, in any such impulse, for "*every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God, and every spirit that confesseth not Jesus, is not of God.*" The Apostle Paul (1 Cor. XII.) likewise says that "no man can say that Jesus is Lord but in the Holy Spirit."

The state of mind needed to see the Divine glory

of the life and character of Christ, or to have any clear view of His coming in the flesh, and of His death, as worthy of the Most High God, belongs not to the natural man. If we are to hold that Jesus Christ is God, not as a doctrine put into mere words, but as a realized fact, we must have our minds opened to know that all that is to us highest and best, and therefore Divine, is to be seen in the very depth to which Christ came down, and in the very painfulness of the sacrifice made for man by the love of the Father. Without a doubt, such a sense of the glory of self-sacrificing love belongs not to our selfish natures apart from the work in them of the Holy Ghost. That a man may believe in the divinity of Christ, so as to confess Jesus, in St. John's sense of the phrase, he must either have no such awe of God, as these Antichrists seem to have had, or he must be *of God,* in sympathy and fellowship with Him, seeing things as God sees them, and judging as He judges. He who has no sense of the Divine glory of Jesus, in the sacrifice of His service and death, gives Him an empty and unmeaning title when he calls Him God. Such an one would do better to make in words no confession of Jesus, and to turn in his worship to a remote and solitary Being, dwelling in what is to him the intelligible glory of a selfish Omnipotence.

The Apostle adds, that of this kind is the spirit of Antichrist—a spirit always present in the world,

because selfishness is always there, and always showing itself in some new shape.

Chap. IV. vv. 4, 5.

Ye are of God, my little children, and have overcome them: because greater is He that is in you than he that is in the world. They are of the world: therefore speak they as of the world, and the world heareth them.

In Chap. II., verse 27th, St. John takes for granted that those to whom he wrote were safe from the error against which he warned them. Here also he is sure that his little children had already got the better of these dreaded Antichrists. "*Ye*," he says, "*have overcome them*." You have been attacked by them; you have had to fight with them for the life of your souls. When they spoke, you have been at a loss to know how to answer them. Your faith has been shaken, but it has not been overthrown. You still hold the truth given to you at the first.

It is well to keep in mind that all who love truth must one day have to fight for it. To believe in a truth does not mean that we are always to be sure of it. The tide of a real and cherished faith may, and often does, ebb and flow. Faith in the words which set forth a truth is not so liable to change. For words, because they have no life, lie still in the

memory, like clothes in a chest. But just as truth itself is dear to us, is the care with which we watch each truth, to see that it is standing firm in its place, and that it has a right to be there. Hence the keenness of our anxiety to be honest with doubt. The partizan shuts his eyes to the weak points in his creed, but the lover of truth cannot help looking at them. He gives doubt a fair field in which it may assail his faith; for until he has met a doubt, and wrestled with it, he cannot judge of its strength; and besides, doubt, though it may assail one or more of our beliefs, has a right to be thought our friend, and the friend of truth. There is indeed a sacredness in doubt like that which belongs to sorrow. It comes to take from us something we had cherished; we cannot be glad of it, we do all we can to keep it from us; but God has often blessed it, so we dare not curse it. For neither in this, nor in any other world, has doubt ever changed a truth into a lie, or a lie into a truth, but has a thousand times hindered us doing so ourselves. Doubt is not the mother of truth, but she is often its best sick-nurse. On no account, therefore, is doubt to be received by us with embittered feeling, but rather to be gravely welcomed by us as we would a physician who, before he leaves us, may pass a sentence of death on one whom we love.

For the coming to us of doubt, then, we must be ready, and for this reason also, that our life is

cast in a region in which doubt has its ancient and proper seat. While we are here on earth our life must be one of "faith, and not of sight."[1] Could we *see* all things there could be no room for doubt any more than for faith. But, as it is, there are few things which, properly speaking, we see; and these few are not those with which we have most to do. We do not believe, for we see, the truths about numbers and lines. We cannot doubt that the three angles of a triangle are equal to two right angles, and that five and five make ten. Such truths as these we see. It is only when doubt about a truth becomes possible that, ceasing to see it, we begin to believe it. Thus it is that on belief, and not on sight, we chiefly rest and act. For there is little indeed of which, in the strict sense of the word, we can be quite sure. We believe in the firmness of the ground, but we cannot be sure of it. All that we have built on it may in the next hour be cast down by an earthquake. We readily put our money in the nearest bank, yet we know it may fail to-morrow. We trust much that money could not buy to the faithfulness of a friend, though friends have been known to betray their trust. We say that we are sure of the earth, of the bank, of our friend, and we would be worse than fools to say anything else; still, in the strict sense of the word, we are not, and cannot be, sure.

[1] 2 Cor. V. 7.

Thus the acts and feelings which make up our lives rest on faith, not on sight; doubt is possible everywhere. Not that we are always, or even often, aware of this. If we were, life would be a burden; but somewhat of doubt is always hanging about us; and though, through habit, we may very seldom feel it, it is, in fact, a life-long drag upon us. When we think about it, we see that even when we are acting on so high a likelihood as that it comes to be, for all our ends, a certainty, there is still a possibility, small perhaps, but real and undeniable, on the other side. It is of this truth that St. Paul is thinking when he says that "we walk by faith, not by sight." We believe; we cannot see.

It is clear that this is very true of the revelation which we believe God has made of Himself to us. It may indeed be asked whether, to finite creatures such as we are, God could so reveal Himself as that we should be quite sure, beyond all doubt, that what we saw and heard was a manifestation of the Most High; for we do not know by sight the Infinite, nor can we set limits to the Possible. But we need not ask such a question, since we clearly see that God has not meant to give us this kind of certainty. The believer feels that the proofs he has of the Bible being a true revelation of God are to him enough for his faith to rest on; but he cannot help seeing also that God, had it pleased Him, could have made that evidence so much stronger as that

he might have got the better of his doubts with a shorter struggle, and not have been so often baffled by the stubborn unbelief of others. We see that it is not the will of God to force any man to believe. He will reveal Himself to us, but not demonstrate Himself. He would not have us worship and obey Him if the conscience and the heart stand aloof; and therefore it is that He surrounds the revelation He has made of Himself with external evidences, so measured and restrained in their strength, as that no man shall be forced by them to take it as true, until his conscience sees in the character, the work, and the aims of God, as set before him above all in Christ, a new and fresh set of evidences, which, when taken along with those that are external, is enough to give him a reasonable ground for his faith.

It is a faith, thus rooted and grounded in a right understanding of God, and love to Him, and that worketh by that love, which St. John knows will overcome the Antichrists, and hold fast by the great truth of the Word having been made flesh. They who are of God will hold this fast—they who are on God's side, who are in fellowship with Him, who see what He sees, and judge as He judges. These are they who can take from error its mask of truth, and who cannot be mocked by false revelations as if from God. If we have a friend whom we love, he is so clearly seen by us through our fellow feeling

with him, that we cannot be led astray by a false message or letter as from him. Even as we know his handwriting, so can we judge of what are, and what are not, his ways of thinking and speaking and acting. The outside evidence for the false message, as from him, may be very strong—that against it very weak; but if what it tells, or asks, does not fit in with what we know of him, we at once set it aside, and we are bound to set it aside. So it is with God. The man whose conscience and heart know Him, will not believe anything of Him that is not in keeping with that knowledge. Even an apostle must "commend" all he says "to every man's conscience."[1] We look for this faithfulness in our friends, and God has always looked for it in His people.

It was part of the law (Deut. XIII.) that if among the Israelites there should arise a prophet or dreamer of dreams, who gave a sign or a wonder which came to pass, this strong proof of his having been sent by God was to be set at naught, if it was used to uphold a strange god, that is, a god whose ways were unlike those proper to Jehovah. The inward witness was to be reckoned stronger than any that could be given from without. So it is here. If St. John's Christians knew and felt that there is nothing so worthy of the highest God as that, in the boundlessness of His pity for man, He should

[1] 2 Cor. IV. 2.

help them at the cost of whatever sacrifice, then they also knew that it could be none other than the spirit of error that led any man to speak of the lowly service and death of Jesus as unworthy of the Son of God. Such enlightened men would also be helped by seeing that in this spirit of self-sacrifice there was rooted a blessedness of the highest and purest kind, and therefore that of God, and that on it was based the strongest as well as the only lasting and wide-reaching power which one being can have over another. It was because of the sacrifice made by Him, and not in spite of it, that Jesus was seen by them to be Divine. It was not by might nor by power, but by this Spirit which was in Christ, that they had been brought to worship Him as the Son of God.

This argument for the divinity of Christ, so mighty with them, cannot indeed silence those on the other side, who, to feel the force of it, would need to gain quite new ideas of glory. But for true Christians, who are in the light, it is enough to make them safe from all misleading about the place of Christ as the Most High. They cannot but believe that the Jesus who came in the flesh is the Son of God.

When St. John goes on to say that one cause of the victory they thus gain over the Antichrists is that "*Greater is He that is in them than he that is in the world,*" we are not to think that he means

that God, by use merely of His greater strength, keeps them from the error held by the world. We must not indeed set bounds to Him in the means He uses for saving His people from their spiritual foes; but what the Apostle here means is, that they who, in the true sense of the word, know God are more drawn towards Him than towards the world. It is this that saves the child of God from error, as well as from sin. When the heart is set on one among many lower things it is ever ready to go over from one to another of these. But just as the object is so good and high as to stand alone, will be the steadfastness of the feeling towards it, and when the conscience and the heart are at one about its being the highest and the best, that which is less than the best courts it in vain. For whatever answers to, and fits into, and quite fills the heart, settles there as into a place of rest. Not that the rest is always unbroken. The soul may be vexed by doubts, and fall into some errors. For to reach a perfect and unmovable rest in God, and in the truth with Him, would need that the soul be altogether and in all things one with Him, and have, up to its measure, a knowledge of Him in which is no shortcoming. To that highest point no child of God ever rises here. Hence on some questions, for the most part small, there will be dispeace in the believer's mind, and in the church, until the wisdom of a quiet waiting for more light be reached,

in which it may please God to reveal even these unto us.[1]

Chap. IV. vv. 5, 6.

They are of the world: therefore speak they as of the world, and the world heareth them. We are of God: he that knoweth God heareth us; he who is not of God heareth us not. By this we know the spirit of truth, and the spirit of error.

We have seen how the Christian may be tempted to error, and this sometimes with a strength which grows with his seriousness, and the single-heartedness of his love of truth. But wherein he has reached likeness to God, so far may he feel that he can know the truth concerning Him. His deeper nature, the hidden man of the heart, has by his birth from God been made anew, so that he partakes of the Divine nature. It is this that makes the children of God strong against error. Right teaching is not enough for this, not even that of the Bible itself. Not enough is the heaping up of evidence, not the clear showing to the intellect of the basis or forms of truth. The heart, the moral bias of the whole man must lean towards any spiritual truth which he shall come really to believe. From this it follows that, as the strength of this bias is not the

[1] Phil. III. 15.

same in all minds, with it will vary the clearness with which truths are seen, and the strength with which they are held. It would be unfair to say that the faith of a Christian thus rests on prejudice, and draws its strength from passion. But it is true that the main battle over a truth is fought in each mind, not so much in the region of the intellect, as in that of the heart. It is so as we know with truth that is not spiritual. We see it often when the question of fact is about money or land. But it is strange that feeling should have anything to do with science, and often give, as it were, colour to the whitest light.

St. John sees this to be notably the case with the truth about God. If they who are of God can escape error, they who are of the world are able to shut out truth. This is what he means when he says, "*They are of the world, therefore speak they as of the world, and the world heareth them.*"

We have already seen what St. John means by the world. With him it is a spiritual region, in which those who live do not give, but crave, and grasp, and take. The region in short of man's nature in so far as it is unrenewed, in which our neighbour is thought of only as a possible servant, and God is seen, if He is seen at all, only to be dreaded, or perhaps to be made useful. For men in the darkness, not seeing God aright, try to make Him their Servant, and to get Him to do their work. Even some, who profess to work for Him, think no

shame to say to their Master, as Jacob did at Bethel,[1] "Gird thyself and serve me, and after I have eaten and drunken, thou shalt eat and drink." For to the world belong many who think themselves religious, just as there are unworldly persons who have not much to do with Christian forms. The world then is seen by the Apostle wherever the spirit of selfishness reigns, and its maxims held to be the beginning and end of all wisdom. It was to this world that the false teachers belonged, and as the servants of its principles that they taught. To suffer, where we can shun suffering, is clearly foolish, they said, and to care for others more than for ourselves is to do a gross injustice to ourselves. But Jesus cared for others more than for Himself, and He suffered when, had He been really God, He could have shunned suffering. He was then either foolish or powerless, therefore He could not be God. This was, as St. John saw it, the error of these false teachers. It is from reasonings such as theirs that much religious error springs.

Thus then those men spake, and the world heard and praised them; for "*to hear*" means in this place, not only to take in the words of a message, but to believe it. But a message, thus to be heard, must have something akin to it in the heart of the hearer. To or from everything that is told us as true we are drawn with greater or less force. If it please us, we

[1] Gen. XXVIII. 20.

are ready to believe it; if we dislike it, we do our best to put it from us, being able for the most part to do this, unless it be in the few cases in which demonstration forces us to see it, and thus makes unbelief impossible. Hence the truth of the Apostle Paul when he says, "with the heart man believeth."[1] We see this in all controversies, whether in the Church or in the State, and that so often, that we take it for granted that perfectly fair thought on any subject is rare: the bias of a mind being stronger than common sense, or reason, or even conscience. When men have once taken a side, debate with them is useless. We ought, therefore, ever to remember that we all have a bias, and that it is likely to turn us not towards doing justice to righteous claims upon us, but rather towards love of ease, or of power, and therefore towards error. Hence indeed the many shades of error, which are ever giving strange colours to truth. Hence the hard struggle the Gospel has to make in enlarging within us, or in the world, the Kingdom of God. Hence also the wisdom of keeping in mind that truth,—or at any rate spiritual truth,—never flatters us, and generally that he, who thinks himself always right, is probably as often wrong.

But it may be asked, whence could be the selfish bias which led many so-called Christians of St. John's day to listen to these false teachers? Nay,

[1] Rom. X. 10.

how came the false teachers themselves to fall into error? For the Christians of these early times must surely have been very honest and very unselfish. In our day men, who care only for themselves, may see many wise reasons for thinking that they are Christians; but it could scarcely have been so then, when the church could hold out no hope of earthly good to those who joined it. Yet in the church to which St. John was writing some were of God, some not of God, some in sympathy with Him and on His side, some really against Him and of the world. No doubt those who were not of God must have seen something in the church to draw them so strongly to it.

When our Lord was on earth, many in whom He did not believe believed in Him, when they saw the miracles which He did.[1] Ananias and Sapphira were very early converts, and yet they had no truth in them. Simon Magus, beholding great signs and wonders wrought, is said to have believed,[2] while yet he was "in the gall of bitterness and the bond of iniquity." It would not be fair to charge those of whom St. John is writing with the sins of Ananias or Simon; they may quite honestly have thought that they had found the truth, and that it was their duty to uphold it. But to have turned from a worn-out Paganism, or to have wakened out of a dead Judaism, to have risen in thought to a great living

[1] John II. 23. [2] Acts VIII. 13.

spiritual Being who ruled the world, does not need any change of heart, or belief in the love of God. A faith founded only on reasonings, or on miracles, does not set those who have it to work by love, or to overcome the world. It may even encourage selfishness, by opening fresh fields in which it may hope to reap new gains. A man whose Christianity is no more than reasonable, whose thinking powers have done their work on religion, without being helped by the heart, who therefore thinks of things heavenly in the same hard way in which he has been used to see things earthly, cannot but speak as of the world, and he will be heard by the world, while those who are of God cannot but see that the true God is quite unknown to him.

But was God—the true God—really unknown to these men, for they also claimed to be moved by the Holy Ghost? St. John does not stop, as St. Paul might have done, to reason out this question. "*We are of God*," is all that he says, "*and he that knoweth God heareth us*." We, the apostles, and all who follow us are right, and all who will not follow us are wrong. He stands on the same ground which he took up in the first words of this Epistle. What he had stated about Jesus were facts, and not notions of his own. That which he and his fellow apostles had seen and heard of the Word of Life, as manifested to them, that they had declared. All this and much more might St. John urge. But to

him the teachers might answer, that he also was a man of like weaknesses with other men. He might be mistaken about what He saw in Jesus. He says that he saw in Him a glory as of the Only Begotten of the Father; they say that, even on his showing, there was in Jesus no such glory. He was good, and on many grounds worthy to be set on high; but to say that One, who was humbled as He was, and who suffered as He did, was the Most High, is to dishonour God.

Such an issue as this can be settled only by finding out what kind of being God is. What are His attributes, and, among these, which is the highest and most glorious? Both sides are at one in thinking Him to be the Most High. But what is it to be the Most High? And who is to be the judge of what makes a being the Most High? On the answer to these questions all rests; not only all that was then at issue between St. John and the false teachers, but all that touches the false and the true, the right and the wrong, in religion.

What then are the highest attributes of God? What is that in Him which is most glorious? The false teachers held that in Jesus the highest and most glorious attributes were not to be found. They may have granted that He wrought miracles, but it was easy for them to add that these works proved no more than that He could do what no other man could do; but by no means that there might not be

in the universe a whole crowd of beings more mighty than He. That He was a sufferer, a weak man, who allowed Himself to be crucified, showed beyond doubt that His power had limits, and therefore He was not the Most High: for an all-powerful being could not thus have been mastered by the strength of evil men. But St. John did not think a being to be highest and most noble, simply because he was the most powerful. The Almighty, if He was no more than almighty, was not to him, therefore, the Most High. Very far indeed above might are truth, and justice, and righteousness, and love. These he saw in Jesus, more nobly shown than in any other he had known or thought of. In His grace and truth He was far above man: and so far, as that higher could not be—for there is no higher, therefore was He the Most High. A more worthy idea of God than this no man can form. "Power belongeth unto God," and power goes far to make up our idea of God. Wisdom goes further, but righteousness far beyond these. To St. John, his conscience—his sense of right and wrong, bore witness to Jesus that He was Divine: and greater witness than this can no man have, for it is the witness of God Himself.

It is certainly not in vain that the church teaches, in a form of words, the Divinity of Christ. But to take these words as part of a creed, does not make the man who signs it a true believer in Jesus as the

Son of God. They alone are blessed to whom that truth is revealed, not by flesh and blood, not by the lips or the hand of man, but by the Father in heaven.[1] Hence no doubt it comes, that while the writers of the New Testament clearly believed in the Divinity of Christ, they sparingly, and as it were grudgingly, put the fact of it into words. They go on obeying the command, laid on them by Christ, when the fact of His being the Son of God was first confessed, that they should tell it to no man (Matt. XVI. 16-20). They seem to feel that not to St. Peter only, or to them, but to any man, in any age, can the Divine Sonship of Jesus be revealed through the understanding, but only through the conscience and the heart. The "Spirit of holiness" thus powerfully declaring Him to be Son of God.[2]

Thus then it is that they, who are led to see that Jesus is come in the flesh, are of God. For this they need not be wise, or learned, or of a strong mind. The true church is not made up of such, or chiefly of such, but of those whose hearts have been touched with a true sense of righteousness, who have ceased to worship self as God, and have come to see the beauty of all goodness. They, even if they have not words in which to state their faith in set terms, are alone able to worship Christ as God. For none other can so much as understand the words which give Him that great name. Nor need these

[1] Matt. XVI. 17. [2] Rom. I. 4.

real worshippers of Christ be perfect, otherwise none could worship Him. But *they* can, who are "going on to know the Lord." They take the side of St. John, their very failures making brighter to them the glory of Him who never failed, who did no sin, and in whose mouth guile was never found.

It may be that they, who now hear the Apostle, have hitherto reached little knowledge of God beyond that He is just and true, and cannot abide sin. This is indeed often the first impression that the sense of the true God makes in the soul which, feeling its sinfulness, forthwith falls into an overwhelming dread of the great Judge, from which it escapes only when it sees the glory of Christ as taking, in His pity, the place of the sinner. Such a view as this of truth often, though certainly not always, marks the first beginnings of the life of God in the soul. But from this point the soul, if its sight of God has been real, will soon rise, and go on with gladness to a further knowledge of God, and to a clear sight of all that is true of Him, as seen in Christ, who alone, as coming from the bosom or heart of the Father, fully declares Him.

It is, on the other hand, no less true that as a man falls away from righteousness, the less is he able to know God, and to see Him in Jesus Christ. Love of sin, and blindness to what is true of God, wax and wane together. Are we then in doubt about any great truth? are we at a loss to know the

spirit of truth from the spirit of error? let us listen to the wisdom of Christ when He says, "if any man wills to do the will of God, he shall know of the doctrine whether it be of God."[1] Do we long for brighter views of truth and a more steadfast faith, let us take up the nearest of the works we ought to do. For it is far easier to force ourselves to a duty than fairly to weigh the truth. "Light is sown for the righteous."[2] Besides, our failures in duty, and we shall often fail, and the hopelessness we often feel about doing all we know we ought to do, will weaken our misleading pride, and show us how strictly to be called Divine is the sinlessness of Christ.

Chap. IV. vv. 7, 8.

Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is begotten of God, and knoweth God. He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love.

St. John has four times already said that the Christian must have in his heart a Godlike love. To say this so often shows what the place is which he gives to charity, but also how hard he felt it, as we also do, to reach it. A fiery spirit like his, impatient of sluggishness and folly and wrong, must

[1] John VII. 17. [2] Psalm XCVII. 11.

often have flamed into wrath at some of the Christian people around him, and thus have tempted him to what he would call sinful hatred. He speaks then as much to himself as to his children when he says, "*Beloved, let us love one another.*" Let us try—you and I together—let us do all we can to love one another. For this love stands first among the graces. Righteousness in its highest form is nothing else than this love, and without it a true faith in Christ cannot be, so that a believer must be one who loves his fellow Christians. It is not so hard to forgive those who know not what they do, as to be on a kindly footing with men who ought to know, and who boast of knowing their duty, and yet will not do it. But indeed there has been, and still is, little effort made in the church to obey this law of brotherly love. One cause of this no doubt is that, misunderstanding the meaning of the word love as used by our Lord and His apostles, Christian men, through despair of so hopeless a task, do not try to love their enemies, or even some whom they cannot deny to be Christian brethren.

Much has already been said about this, but it can scarce be too often urged, that to love others does not here mean that we are to be greatly pleased with all the people we meet, or even to like them. Christian love may, and often does, rise to the height of warmest feeling; but this need not belong to it. It is a principle which may warm into pas-

sionate feeling; but in itself it is simply a principle, on which is founded a fixed purpose in no wise to hurt, but in all ways to help our fellow-men, and, above all, those of them who with ourselves are of the household of faith. It is true that our feelings are not so under our will as that we can keep the bad among them from awakening; but we can set ourselves to carry out a principle in spite of feeling, and to give to feelings that are wrong none of their own way, in deed, or in word, or even in cherished thought. This is certainly within the power of our will. Such keeping under of feeling, our common sense calls for every day, and we should surely be equal to it when our Saviour asks it of us. We cannot hope that every man who is a Christian shall, any more than ourselves, be free from such faults as may make us dislike him, and him dislike us. But if we cannot like him, we can, in St. John's sense of the word, love him. We can suffer long with him, and be kind to him, we can try to forget what harm he may have done, and take care that we do none to him. We can cover his faults, we can believe all the good we can of him, and strive to hope the best from him, and so far reach towards St. Paul's height of Christian love. We can force ourselves to feed an enemy if he be hungry, and if he thirst to give him drink; thus, it may be, painfully denying ourselves, and taking up a heavy cross, in our wish to follow Christ; remembering,

too, how to fail in this is to abide in the spiritual death of what St. John calls hate.

Because, therefore, we should forget nothing that can help us to keep this law of love, St. John goes on to remind us that "*love is of God*," that "*every one that loveth is born of God*," and that he "*knows God*." These motives to Christian love St. John has already urged, and the force of them we have tried to feel. It helps us much indeed towards the habit of Christian love, to know that it is "*of God*," —that it is His, above all else that is His, so that it cannot be said of Him that in laying this law on us He has not Himself touched the burden of it. What He by it tells us to do, He Himself has done. Are we to forgive our enemies? He has forgiven us all that great debt. Are we to love them that hate us? did He not love us? Are we to sacrifice much for the good of others? What is there that we can give up, that can be set beside His gift of His Son for us? What can equal the touching force of our Lord's question, when, in teaching the lesson of unselfish love, He saith, "Know ye what I have done to you?"

And if love is thus of God, so as to be His great attribute, it should certainly be found in those who are born of Him. Indeed so clearly a mark of Sonship is it, that St. John is not afraid to say, that "*every one that loveth*" after the manner of God's love "*is begotten of Him*." Strong words,

which they who are ready to make almost anything else a token or proof of the new birth, would do well to weigh. For St. John is sure that "*he that loveth his brother is abiding in the light*" (Chap. II. v. 10), however bounded his views may be, and that "*every one that doeth righteousness is begotten of God*" (Chap. II. v. 29).

It may perhaps be said of this love, which St. John thus urges upon us, that, if we think of it only as the highest form of righteousness, it loses all its beauty. But indeed it is only by thus treating the Word, that we so cleanse it of misleading suggestion, as that we can worthily speak of it as being "*of God*." Besides, in any other sense of the word "love," it would be vain for the Apostle to tell us to have it, one towards the other. We cannot be forced, nor can we force ourselves, to love in the sense of taking pleasure in or feeling affection for any one. For the heart in its choice is always free. But we can force ourselves to shun every deed or word that would hurt our neighbour, and to do all we can to help him. This also is certain (so well does our nature fit in with the law of Him who created it), that if, beginning with only a cold sense of duty, we try to do nothing but good to others, the hard principle we act on will in its working warm into an enthusiasm for the well-being of our neighbours, and even become a passion of eagerness to spend and to be spent, as Christ

was, in their service. Or, at least, there will arise a feeling of tender interest in some of those from whom our heart at first had shrunk. It is one of the reasons why it is more blessed to give than to receive, that we really come to like those, whom in spite of themselves we do not cease to help, more, we often find, than they like us.

But every one that loveth is not only born of God, he also "*knoweth God*." That is to say, he is able to understand God: to enter with sympathy into the secret of His character, so as to see the meaning of His ways. While, on the other hand, he that loveth not cannot know God. St. John here takes for granted the great truth, that we cannot know anything, so that it shall be real to us, if we have not known it for ourselves. This is true of things seen with the eye. It is not enough to have given us a word picture of that, whatever it may be, which is quite unlike anything stored in our memory. The first sight of the ocean, to a man born and bred in some inland place, opens to him a new world, though he may have read many books that told of a seafaring life. It is so with light and colour when first seen by a man born blind: so also is it with grief, to one who has never lost a friend. A coward can never believe that to some men there is a joy in danger, or a mean man that there is a pleasure in giving; so here, a man who has never loved as God loves us, cannot know the love of

God. "I have heard of Thee," saith Job, "with the hearing of the ear, but now mine eye seeth Thee," and every thought and feeling is changed. Hence it is, that just as a man, born blind, may be taught all that is known about light until he can teach others, who see, much that they did not know about it, and yet himself have no idea whatever of light, so may one set forth in touching words the love of God, and yet not have the faintest idea of what it really is. Men who have only a low sense of honesty reckon the discharged debtor a fool who, when good times come again to him, pays all he ever owed; so to loveless, selfish men the Cross of Christ is a foolishness they cannot understand. They cannot see why Christ willingly died. There are even those, who can boast of their great escape through the death of Christ, who have not the slightest sympathy with Him in His dying.

Such men understand the power of God, for there are some whom they too can punish or reward; and so far His wisdom, and justice, and truth, they themselves being not altogether unjust or false or mindless; but as to love like the love of God, it is strange to them. It may indeed be said that there is no one who has not felt more or less of love—no one, therefore, who is not able to understand love in another. But love, as the word is for the most part used, is a selfish passion, and thus can give no hint to any one of the love of God. Not that

most noble, self-forgetting love is not known among us, as when by deadly sick-beds men and women count not their own lives dear to them, that they may rescue strangers by their care. Every day we see this love in parents, giving up for their children much—sometimes all; and so like is this love to that of God that He, by calling Himself our Father, would teach us how He loves; but teaches, for the most part, in vain. For men fix, not on the unselfishness of such love, but on the narrow bounds of it, and, thinking of these, limit to a few the love of God. He, they think, loves, as men do, only His children, while He leaves uncared for all who are without.

But, again, it may be said that while it is indeed an evil that men should thus fail to see the largeness of the love of God, still, with little or no knowledge of it, they may worship and serve Him well. But St. John makes this a fatal want. It is not only that they who know not the love of God must spend a dull and hard religious life; they do not know God at all. Of a neighbour whose heart is hidden from us we know little indeed. It is what we think to be its bent with us or against us which leads us to seek him or to shun him, to be afraid of him or to trust him as our friend. An unloving God may no doubt be served, but the service is base, for it can rest on nothing better than self-love, and belongs therefore to the state of the dead, not of

the living, soul. "*He then that loveth not knoweth not God.*" He can have no true knowledge of Him, for love is so large, so outstanding a mark of God, that an unloving being, however powerful or wise, is not God.

It is to press this truth home to us that St. John is bold enough to say "*God is love.*" To the height from which St. John saw this truth we cannot climb. We take with thankfulness the report of it from him who saw it. We see how great a truth it is. The issues of it stretch away far out of our sight. It awakens in us hopes to which we can give no shape. We look up to it as that which one day may save us from our worst misgivings. But we dare not try to bring it down to the earth beside us, or to treat it as if we had grasped it, and made it all our own. "It is high, we cannot attain to it." Surely it is the greatest of all truths ever unveiled to us, and to believe it, even with a very dull sense of all that it means and points to, is surely the best act of faith.

But Doubt, which so often waylays Faith when she would be about her noblest business, asks in the face of the Apostle if it is true that God is Love? It is not easy to believe this of God. We have not only to get over the instinct which leads us to think Him like ourselves, but our doubt is strengthened by the truth found, not only in creeds, but in Scripture, that God does all things for His own glory.

Now we feel, taking that word "*glory*," in the sense we are wont to give it, that if a man did all things for his own glory he would be selfish indeed. How then can God be Love? But if it be so that God is Love, if that which is most glorious in Him be His love, and if what He does is fitted to show forth the glory of His unselfishness, He cannot be selfish in making it manifest. It is due to Himself that He should not be misunderstood, due to us that we should not misunderstand Him, and kind, above all, that He should make His love known to us, so that we might know that there is in Him a glory higher than that of power, and yield to Him a more worthy service than that of dread.

Chap. IV. vv. 9, 10.

Herein was the love of God manifested in us, that God hath sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him. Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us, and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins.

St. John has told us that the love of God is so great that it may be said of Him that He is Love. But how is God to make clear to us that His love is so very great? It would seem easy for a being possessed of all power to show himself unselfish. He has only to do good to every one, and hurt no

one, for all to acknowledge that He is kind and good. This would be true if we all knew what was good for us, and what really hurtful, and, further, if we understood what is meant when we speak of God as Almighty. If there could be a man of pure goodness, who knew all things, then he would see the present and the future as God sees them, and be able to judge whether God is doing all that He can do for the well-being of His creatures. But whatever he might in the end come to think of God, this is certain : that such an one would very seldom think that to be good for us which we think good, or bad for us which we look on as evil. And therefore by no man, blind as we all are, and knowing so little, can God's dealings with us be seen to be full of love. It is quite clear that if to us, with such knowledge as is ours, God should seem always loving, things most unrighteous, and often most hurtful to us, would need to be done by Him. In fact our unfavourable judgment of Him would only be put off till time had taught us a few lessons. But such things could not be done by Him whose righteousness is everlasting, and whose law to Himself, as well as to us, is the truth. God cannot use means, to make us think of Him as loving, which are unworthy of His justice and truth—nay, false to His love itself.

But if so, why, it may be asked, did God create beings unable to understand Him, to whom, for

whatever reason, He could not every day make it clear, by His dealings with them, that He loved them? Surely boundless power and wisdom could not have been so baffled had they been urged by boundless love. Much has been said by way of answer to this question, which is really the same as—Why did God make men able to sin? Much has been said, but not much that fully meets the difficulty. It seems true that a being like man could not be created in the image of God, and therefore having freedom of choice—or, in other words, holding as truly his own a realm from which God, limiting Himself, withdraws, so as to leave the man to rule it with a true sovereignty,—without the risk being great that man, being finite, would err in the ruling of it. Else would he have been a mere machine, driven in all its workings by a power quite outside of himself. In that case clearly, his conscience, given him by his Maker, would be uttering an endless falsehood, when it told him, as it ever does, that he is answerable for all he does. God, therefore, could not create *a man* who could not sin.

This seems to have some truth in it, though it does not reach all the deeper roots of the difficulty, nor can we be sure of anything which lies so near the utmost limit of the region in which our minds can search for truth. More clearly true is it that we see only the first beginnings of God's work with

man. Endless time is before Him in which to finish it, both with those who have been, and those who are yet to be, and not in our time therefore can any ripe judgment be passed upon it. This only may further be said that, even in this life, we do often come to see, when we turn as it were and look back, that goodness and mercy have been following us all the days of it, though we certainly did not see them beside us as we went along. As we become old we change our minds about many acts of God which once seemed to us cruel and wasteful, and we thus gather some ground for believing that the time may come when we shall see a wise and far-reaching love in all that under the rule of God has befallen man. But if we see this we must wish to see it, for the time to be sure of it on such grounds as these has not come, so long as the squalid vice and misery of man is so great in the earth. The cry still rises, as it did so long ago, "Why hast thou made all men in vain?" In short, there is no finding out of God by the light of nature, no clear manifestation in the world, as we see it, of the loving kindness of God.

We might blame our sinful blindness for allowing such thoughts, were it not that St. John shows, by the words he here uses, that our thoughts are his also. For he says that the love of God was manifested "*in this*" one fact, and in nothing else; and not by clear signs outside of us, but "*in us,*" that

God sent His only begotten Son into the world *that we might live through Him*. This is the one proof, which no hard questioning can shake, of the reality and greatness of God's love to us. For just as if we see a man carrying out some purpose, at the cost of all that we know to be dearest to him, we take for granted not only that this end he thus gained was dear above all else to his heart, but also that there was no other way of reaching it, but by that greatest sacrifice, so may we be sure that if the world could in any other way have been raised from its baseness and misery—if life could otherwise have been given to it—if by other means the love of God towards it could have been proved—if Almighty power could have so created it, with man upon it, as that it should never have needed to be saved and raised to life, we may be sure indeed that the Son of God would not have been sent to die for it. It was a series of temptations to take other ways which Christ resisted in the wilderness. If a word of boundless power could have wrought the same good, that sacrifice by God never would have been made. But it was made, and in that fact St. John sees, and we too must see, a proof of the love of God, which far outweighs all that can ever tempt us to doubt it. For it was not the most noble of all creatures whom God sent into the world, but His own *Son*, and not one of many sons, but "*His Only Begotten*," one with Himself in boundless and

eternal love. Such was He whom God in His pitying love sent to suffering and death, that we, blind, miserable, and dead in sin, might live.

There is indeed much in God's dealings with man on earth, any kindness in which we cannot see. But what we know not now we may know hereafter, and with such proof of the love of God as is given us in Christ we may well wait and thankfully rest in it, till the morning comes of clearer light. Christ saves us from many evils, but surely from none greater than from ignorance of the love of God, for to lose hope of that is akin to spiritual death.

But St. John does not yet feel that he has set clearly enough before us the greatness of the love of God, or even the true nature of it. He fancies that we may have thought that we understood Him because we know something of thankfulness, and friendship, and kind feeling, and because we have made some sacrifices through love to those who love us. So he goes on to show that God's love is far greater, and of a kind more noble, than any of ours. We measure love by the sacrifices it makes. But how can God's love be thus measured? He can do anything by the word of His power. He can give us anything without any cost to Himself, for a word costs nothing. Had we such might as His, what would we not do for those whom we love! What safety, what help, what gifts, would

be theirs! But God, with all His power, does not seem to do much for those whom He is said to love. He withholds much from them; He sends many sorrows to them. If we are to be made sure, beyond all reasonable doubt, that God is love, a sacrifice must be made by Him great enough to save from unbelief in that love a man who is made wretched by the vice and baseness around him, as well as a mother who is trying to soothe the last cries of her dying child. And this sacrifice must also be of such a kind as that all shall be able to measure the greatness and worth of it. We know what that was —the sacrifice of His Son. This only could be great enough and clear enough. Nay, God, to whom the universe belongs, had nothing else, the giving up of which could be a sacrifice to Him.

But St. John does not think it enough to show us even this. Men have been known to give up all that they held most dear, for a friend who had fallen on evil days, through no fault of his own; and most strongly have they been moved to such a sacrifice, if the fault which brought the misery to their friend could even unfairly be laid at their door. But it was not so with God's sacrifice for us. We know that we brought our misery on ourselves. We were not the friends of God; we were not such as could call out in Him any sympathy or fondness. It was our unlovableness that moved His love. Our misery, our want, our danger gave the only

reasons why, at so great a cost, He went forth to save us. "*Herein indeed is love.*" Here is that to which may well be given that great name, love unmerited, unsought, unvalued.

But out of all this, as out of all that is true of a loving God, men can reason themselves. Apart, they say, from that strange relationship of which you speak, between an Eternal Father and a Son eternally begotten, you dethrone God by making Him really nothing else than a mere man. God can be thought of only as infinite, unchanging, without shadow of turning, therefore He can have no feeling, for that means change; and, above all, no feeling of pain, or even of unwillingness, for that means suffering and conflict. Therefore God can make no such thing as a sacrifice. But truly all such reasoning is quite out of place when used about truths so far above us as those which have to do with the nature of God. It is only because we are men, and because man was made in the image of God, that we can know God at all. The facts of our nature, as God at first made it, point straight towards what is true of God, and we, if we be made anew in His image, can go in the line of their guidance to the utmost limit of thought, without fear of error. They can never lead even a perfected saint to a point from which all of God can be seen, but they take even us, each as we are, far enough to enable us to see as clearly as anything

can be seen of One, who has a Being not the same as ours, that He has that which is of the same kind, and answers in Him the same end, as feeling, or wish, or will, do with us. That love, of which St. John says that we had it not towards God, is of the same kind which God had towards us, and is His and not ours in this, not that we cannot reach it, but that we have not reached it. We too may some day feel that same wonderful pity for all the unhappy which urged Him to send "*His Son to be the propitiation for our sins.*"

St. John is not at this point using a mere set phrase, when (as in Chap. II. 2) he speaks of Christ as "the propitiation for our sins." It was not part of his plan to dwell on the sacrifice of Christ, otherwise than it makes clear to us the reality and greatness of the love of God. But St. John no doubt saw that such a sacrifice could not have been laid on Christ, but for the justice as well as the love of God. This point, however, St. John does not take up. He gives us no theory of the atonement. He does not try to show us how in it mercy and truth, peace and righteousness, met together. But he clearly sees the fact of it. He sees that if on the one hand Christ as God died for us, on the other the Father sent Him to His death: which He could not have done, His justice being the same as ours, unless that death, and all the sorrow of it, had been in some way justly due to Him who died and

suffered. Love is great, and righteousness in its highest form rises up to it, as St. John has shown us, but justice lies nearer than love to the foundations of all that is right. So that love not resting on justice has no ground worthy of God on which to do its work. And it is because, in keeping with a principle which runs through all that binds men together into one body, Christ came into our place, and bore our sins, so that in a sense they became His, that by His sacrifice He not only reconciles us to God by making manifest to us His love, but also satisfies Divine justice. It is because St. John knows that Christ was not only made like unto His brethren, but that He became also one with them, that he speaks here of the propitiation of Christ as a part of His work, without which the rest of it could not have been wrought. But what above all else the Apostle would have us very clearly see, is that it was not a most noble creature, enriched with the best gifts, whom God sent: not one whose title of Son carried with it the idea of no more than close fellowship and love. He whom the Father sent was *His Son, His only begotten Son,* who is with God, and who is God, "the outshining of His glory and the impress of His substance,"[1] One who is to the Father as the ray of light to the source of light, or as the stream is to the fountain, or as the word uttered to the mind from which it springs.

[1] Heb. I. 3.

We must not think lightly of this truth because it is hard, or rather hopeless, so to set it before our minds as that we can take all of it in at once. Nor may we even put it partly aside, as if it belonged to theory rather than to fact. For if the Son was not God, one with the Father, then to send Him to suffer, while the sender kept Himself aloof from pain, would not be a sign of a Godlike unselfishness. What St. John believed is this: that it was He by whom the worlds were made, He by whom all things exist; that it was God Himself who became flesh and offered Himself as the propitiation for our sins. That Christ is God is indeed to us no mere incumbrance of barren words needed to make up a theory of the atonement; it is a great fact, without which we could neither see nor believe in the love—the utter unselfishness of God.

Chap. IV. vv. 11, 12 (a).

Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No man hath beheld God at any time.

Besides those which St. John has met, many questions may easily be put which throw doubt on the love of God, and the reality of the sacrifice of Christ. Most of these arise, not out of what God has taught, but out of the additions which have been made to His teaching. Throwing them, how-

ever, aside, not a few still remain to which it must be said that no final answer can be given by us. The reason being, that they belong to a sphere to which our thoughts cannot rise. Up to a certain point the doings and aims of God are not beyond our understanding. Above that point, when as here they touch the person of Jesus Christ, or where they have to do with beings unlike us, and with other states of our own being, and with eternity, they are beyond even our guess. Nor can it be otherwise. The wealth of knowledge that can ever be ours is bounded not only by the largeness of its source, but not less by the room we have for it in our minds. As to many things, therefore, we would like to know, we must doubt, not only whether we by searching can ever find them out for ourselves, but also whether God could reveal them to us. For almighty power itself cannot put into our minds that which they cannot hold, or make the finite partaker of the infinite. There are and must be hidden things which belong to the Lord our God. The revealed things which belong to us were enough to make St. John sure that God loved him, and had sent His only begotten Son to be the propitiation for his sins; and thus to fill his life on earth, and the life of any man who like him has seen this to be true, with patience and comfort and hope. And yet it is true that neither he nor we can put more than a remotely suggestive sense in the word

"begotten," or tell in how many particulars the ideas connected with earthly sonship are to be applied to the relations of Christ to the Father.

But as man's love of self is ever ready to turn to evil use God's best gifts to him, so here St. John, aware of this, would lead our thoughts away from comfort and joy into a safer path. For we can see, in ourselves and others, a readiness to make the love of God uphold our selfishness, our pride, our sinfulness. We blame the luxury that pampers the flesh. It weakens a man, we say, and drags down his soul till it cleaves to the earth. But we forget that there can be such a thing as spiritual luxury, which is not less selfish than that of the flesh, only not so coarse. To feed our souls only on promises and hopes of joy is to run the risk of filling them with disease, and the risk is all the greater that thus to feed the soul seems to be the best work of faith. But meanwhile God ceases to be our Master. We do not try to live to Him, we think of Him rather as living for us. We may not lift ourselves up against Him, but our pride lifts us up beside Him, even above Him. If He loves us so much there must be in us something very noble to love, and if it was while we were yet in our sins that He loved us, may we not go on in sin that His grace may the more abound. Nay, sin cannot be so great an evil, since it did not hinder Him in loving us. Not that in many minds such thoughts show them-

selves clearly. They hide behind great truths, they need to be searched for before we can see them, but they certainly work much secret evil, undermining the very life of the soul. It is to rid us of them that St. John here tells us of a duty, which he sees to follow close on a belief in God's love to us. His words have the greater force that we did not look for them. If God so loved us, it surely follows that we ought to love Him. But that is not what St. John says. It is that "*We also ought to love one another.*"

It is not wonderful that St. John should in so marked a way set this forth as among the first of duties. Our Lord had taught him a lesson about it which he never forgot. He did love his Lord, giving Him his whole heart, and he showed it by feeling so much anger when an unkindness was done to Christ by a Samaritan village, that he would fain have called down fire from heaven to burn it up. A feeling not without love in it, since it was love that gave to it so great strength. But Christ strongly checked it. "Ye know not," He said, "what spirit ye are of."[1] No love can cover the sin of such ruthlessness towards your fellows, as that you could wish to take away the lives of men. For no such end did I come. "I came not to destroy men's lives, but to save." A fiery spirit like that of St. John could ill bear to be plunged

[1] Luke IX. 55.

into the cold of such a reproof, though afterwards he would see in it somewhat of the grace whereby he knew that Jesus had the glory as of the Only Begotten of the Father. It would take time before he could order his feelings towards his Master, so as to love His meekness and gentleness as he had loved His fearlessness and truth and His kindness towards himself. But such a lesson was needed by him. For as steel is tempered and the body braced by being plunged into that which chills it, so is it with our souls if they are to be fitted for their work. We must learn to do what is right without being moved to it by warm feeling, and therefore God often thus deals with His children, and St. John like a faithful servant thus deals here with us. He heats our spirits until they glow with the love of God, and then tells us to love one another. It is like St. Paul who, when he has made us joyful in our victory over death and sin, forthwith sends us to abound in the work of the Lord by making a collection for the poor saints (1 Cor. xiv. 58, and xv. 1). A great lesson, if it teaches us evermore to feel that a man cannot be of a right spirit towards God if he be wrong in heart towards his fellowmen, and that God thinks little of love to Himself if along with it there be not love to our neighbour also. For there are those of us who are so unlike God in His love, that they are greatly pleased if they find a heart that has no

room in it for any but themselves, and who therefore, judging amiss of God, would threaten with His wrath a mother who heartily loved her child. Besides, and this is clearly what St. John feels as he begins the next verse, a man much more easily brings himself to believe that he is loving God than he can honestly rejoice in having a true charity towards his neighbour.

Our fellow-men, our brethren, are always beside us. We see them every day, we have much to do with them. We thus know the best of them, but also the worst. It is only for a little while that we can spend an unreal life with any one of them, feigning him to ourselves as we would like him to be. We must take him as he is. We can fancy ourselves with people, all of whom we could love; people who would never disappoint, or vex, or enrage us, but we do not meet many such. Men have so many ways, and each his own, that we cannot but sometimes meet good Christians who thwart and vex us. They do not see quite what we see, or work as we work; whence arises so sharp a debate, that shame scarce hinders the calling down of fire by one on the head of the other. In short, with many whom we meet in the church itself, we cannot cheat ourselves into the belief that we are loving them as Christ loved us.

But we can very easily deceive ourselves about our love to God. We do not see Him. "No man,"

saith St. John, "hath seen God at any time."[1] He does not force on us the fact of His nearness. Above all we do not behold, or never cease to see, Him. The spiritual eye probably of no man on earth has a constant vision of Him. We can forget Him when His presence would break our peace. We can use our fancy about Him. We can strip Him of all we dislike, and clothe Him with all that pleases us most,—with all that brings us joy, and that flatters self, and then say and really think that we love God. Now in this world we often see that people love others, not because they know them, but because they do not know them. With further acquaintance there is less love, with long acquaintance none. It was so with our Lord when He was on earth. Many believed on His name, who, when He uttered hard truths which they could not bear, went back and walked no more with Him.[2] So it is still with God. Did we never cease to behold Him, were He as much and as clearly with us as our fellow-men are, were all facts that are true of Him forced on us, are we sure that we, who think we love Him, would go on feeling that love? It may indeed be a question whether men, who boast that they never felt anger against God, have not little, rather than great faith. For when a faith, strong enough to see the invisible, has made it clear to us that it was God who blighted the cool shade

[1] John I. 18. [2] John VI. 66.

that sheltered us from the heat, have we not sat, sullen as Jonah, beside our withered gourd? Is it not the case that when some truth about God is so forced on us that we cannot help seeing it, the love we thought we had for Him turns cold? If Christ were again beside us, and we, moved by strong feeling, said, "Lord, I will follow Thee," would not our love be damped, if, by way of answer, He told us to sell all that we had and give it to the poor? or that we must deny ourselves daily, and take up the cross? might we not go away, sorrowful perhaps, but displeased? Nay, is it that we have never done so?

Our Lord once said, "When Christ cometh will He find faith in the earth?" and we can see that if He now came among us, and it was found, as it certainly would be found, that He thought more highly of one set or sect of Christians than of another, or, what is very likely, that He thought none of them quite right, it would be very hard for those whom He blamed for views, long and strongly held, heartily to believe and follow Him with a clinging love, when He thus took the side of those whom they had been used to hold up as the foes of truth. The race has not died out, we may be sure, that for no other reason than this, rejected, when our Lord was on earth, the counsel of God against themselves: and many, who could not go so far as these, would be sorely tempted to

that unbelief of the heart, which in the sight of God is more real than that of the understanding. It seems indeed doubtful, if we think of it, whether Christ, if He now came, would be heartily welcomed by many Christians,—doubtful whether the tokens He could give of His being really the Christ, would prove to more than a few, even of those who call themselves by His name, that He was the same Jesus who died in Judea 1800 years ago. The question, "Art thou He that should come, or look we for another?" would be put again by some who wonder at the doubting message of John the Baptist.

It is for such reasons as these that St. John would have us know, that a love high and noble as the love of God to us is perfected in us, not when we are quite sure that we are loving God, but when we have love one to another: for this is the hardest task to which love can be set. Besides, we cannot readily deceive ourselves about it, and mistake for love a mere looking for further benefits, which we can easily do when the question is about our love to God. It is indeed a great and very useful truth, that if, as God loved us with all *our* faults, we can love those around us with all *their* faults, having towards them at no time any bad feeling, but only forgiveness and kindness, and a helpfulness, that stops short of no sacrifices, then have we reached the very height of love.

Chap. IV. vv. 12 (b), 13.

If we love one another, God abideth in us, and His love is perfected in us: hereby know we that we abide in Him, and He in us, because He hath given us of His Spirit.

St. John had said that "*no man hath beheld God at any time*." Hence the danger, as we have seen, of falling into error about our having love to God, and the need felt by the Apostle of setting us to the harder task of loving one another, that so we may reach the height of charity. But if God was never beheld by us, it is possible for us to enjoy what is far better than any vision of Him. We can have His presence, not only near us, but in us. For "*if we love one another, God abideth in us.*"

As to the abiding of God in the soul much has been already said (Chap. III. v. 24), which need not be said again. There this abiding goes along with keeping the commandments of God, here with loving one another. So that the one as much as the other is a true mark of that unbroken union of the soul with God, without which, our Lord tells us, "a man is cast out as a branch, and is withered."[1] For indeed it is one thing to believe, and another to abide in a belief: one thing to be touched by a sense of the reality of God, and another

[1] John XV. 6.

thing always to feel it: one thing to have a wish to be holy, and another never to cease longing after likeness to Christ. Into the night of the darkest soul there comes sometimes a gleam of light. There are few men who have not more than once seen heaven opened. But not to lose that vision, to live a life of faith, to dwell in a sense of God's nearness to us, as in the air we breathe, to feel that away from Him is death—thus to abide in God, taking Him into our hearts, so that He may also abide in us, and send life through soul and spirit, this is indeed to live.

But St. John, watchful as he ever is against the risk of our being false to ourselves, would not have us to be very sure that, because we are kind and helpful to some around us, therefore God is dwelling in us, and that a love at all like His is therefore in us. For a man may add much to the happiness of his neighbours from an easy sweetness of nature, which, good as it is, and as far as it goes, is not the same as Christian love, as we may see from the strange bitterness which what we call sweet natures often show. Kindnesses too are often done, because vanity, or a sense of our own value, is thus cheaply fed. But Christian love works in secret, asking no man for praise. It is helped by sweetness of temper, but it can live and thrive in natures that without it would be harsh and sour. It can overlook thanklessness and even wrong, and overcome

dislike. The man who has it in him looks on the world as God does. In every man he sees, under the husk which may have no beauty, a human soul like his own, to which belongs an eternity of possibilities. As we do not cease to love our friend though in the madness of fever he rages at us, so the very wretchedness of man, in his being able to do hateful things, melts the loving soul with pity.

But love of this kind comes not from ourselves. To lay down life for a friend—to dare to die for a good man—may be within the reach of beings made at first in the image of God. But to forbear with, to forgive, to help an enemy, to love others as Christ loved us, in this, if we reach it, or come near it, we may joyfully see a proof of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit of God. A change has come over us which we did not make, a gift has reached us which must have come to us from without. It is as if we found in our house a precious thing which we know we did not bring into it, but which some one had promised to send us. So in having a Christlike love for others we see a marked sign that "*God hath given us of His Spirit.*"

We cannot be too glad when a gift, clearly from God, has come to us, so much does this strengthen our faith in Him. We believe, but we cannot be sure, that many things we have and prize came to us from God. They belong to the outer world, and may often be traced to causes which are not beyond

it. But when a gift, like that of a Christlike love, comes into that little world, through which we have searched so often, and which we know so well, we feel that God sent it. We are sure that it was not there, we did not put it there, but God promised it to us, and it has reached us. It must have come from Him. Men shut up in a mine that has fallen in, if they feel that they can breathe and live, are sure that there must be some open way through which the fresh air is reaching them; so if our souls are not sinking into the spiritual death of selfishness, we may take it as a sign that we are abiding in God and He in us.

We should make large use of the proof which we get of the being and nearness of God from the miracles He works in our little world. How do I know—let each man ask himself—that there is a God? The answer may be that there are many proofs of this; but by far the strongest to each one of us are those which we find, not in the great world outside of us, but in the spiritual world within. There are works there which are marks of His presence and of His character, and when we see these, we believe in Him no longer because of what others have told us, but on the ground of our own knowledge. Thenceforth we can do without the witness even of the apostles.

St. John uses here almost the same words which we find at the end of Chap. III. They may mean

in both cases that we cannot know that we are abiding in God, and He in us, unless through the witness of the Holy Spirit. This truth, if the Apostle meant to state it, quite fits in with all he has been saying. For the Spirit, as St. Paul tells us, beareth witness along with our spirits to the reality of what we have seen in our inner world. This is truly in keeping with all that we know of His work. We might well be afraid to say even to ourselves that God is dwelling in us. It belongs to the love of God, therefore, to strengthen us "with all might by His Spirit inwardly in the inner man," till we can believe that His love is great enough to lead Him in very deed to dwell not with, but in, such as we are.

Chap. IV. v. 14.

And we have beheld and bear witness that the Father hath sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world.

These words at first sight seem to have little to do in the place where we find them. But we may see that they really follow closely on what St. John has just been saying. The antichrists with their false teaching are still in his thoughts. They said that Jesus was not Divine—not the Son of God. To prove them to be wrong, St. John had brought forward the great miracles of righteousness and

holiness and love, which filled the whole life of Jesus with a glory as of the only begotten Son of the Father. From Him too had come the Apostle's spiritual life, with all its keenness of feeling for others, and its unselfish love. He had given to them a spirit unknown to them before, which could be none other than the Holy Spirit of God. It was He, they felt, abiding in them and giving them a new heart, full of love to each other, which made them fit to see in the self-sacrifice of Christ a glory truly Divine.

But in this change of heart, in this awakening within them of a Godlike love, St. John saw a still further proof of the Divinity of Christ. In it He had showed forth not only Divine grace and truth, but Divine power also. The false teachers saw in Him no power. They pointed to His sorrows, His sufferings, His death. They took as their own the mocking words of the crowd before the Cross, "If Thou art the Son of God come down from the Cross, and we will believe." That proof of His being no more than man, so strong from a worldly point of view, the false teachers could urge, and the world would hear them. They may have allowed that Jesus worked miracles, for in those days that seems never to have been doubted. But it was easy for them to say that these works proved that He could do what other men could not do, but by no means that there could not be a whole chain of beings

higher than He, yet lower all of them than God. These works showed that in some things, for a part of His life, He was higher than man, but not that He was the Most High over all.

This and much more of the same kind might be urged, and not without force, had our Lord's miracles only shown that He had strange powers. Men, certainly not of God, have done very wonderful things. The same page of Exodus which tells us of the signs wrought by Moses, tells us that the Egyptian magicians "did in like manner with their enchantments,"[1] and it seems likely, though we are not forced to believe it, that in many ages and lands signs like these have been wrought.

But St. John, when he saw in Jesus a Divine power, was not thinking of miracles such as these. He and St. Paul in their Epistles make no use of arguments from them. The mighty works, which proved to them that Jesus was the Son of God, were wrought not in the outer world chiefly, but in the inner world of the soul. The others were but symbols of the greater works[2] by which, not the bodies, but the souls of men are healed, and fed, and raised to life, saved from danger, filled with peace. Works greater than any others, not only because hopelessly beyond the power of man, but because the good they did was unmixed and unending. While even the raising of Lazarus, supreme

[1] Exod. VII. 11-22. [2] John XIV. 12.

among signs as it was, must ever seem an act of doubtful good to him at least. Such were the greater works than His own miracles which our Lord told His disciples should one day be wrought by them in His name.

These works of the true Saviour, wrought in the inner world of the soul, St. John says that he and his brethren beheld, and that to them they bear witness. We too behold them, and bear witness to them. These same great miracles are still wrought in the Christian church. In place of one voice, which sought healing from Christ when He was on earth, a thousand now beseech Him to make them whole. The same words of entreaty which met Him in Galilee, reach Him now from all places where men know His name, and have a like answer. We, as did the disciples of the Baptist, may hear and see how "the blind receive their sight and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, the dead are raised and the poor have the Gospel preached to them."[1] There is no miracle which Christ wrought when on earth which has not been also wrought by Him in the spiritual world, known to ourselves, and in us. The devil in us has been cast out, the storm of passion changed into a calm, the mountain cast into the midst of the sea.

But all these proofs of the nearness and Divine power of Christ are lost if, as many do, we think

[1] Matt. XI. 5.

of Him only as a Saviour in the time to come. He does indeed save us from the guilt of sin, and it is for the sake of Him that we shall be acknowledged and acquitted on the day of judgment. On that day there will be indeed notable signs of His power. But of these as proofs of it we can just now make no use. We can, however, use, for the strengthening of our faith, what we can see every day in ourselves and others of His power to save.

It is indeed a barren Gospel, yielding little food for the growth of the soul, which does not set forth Christ as our Saviour, now and here, from all the worst evils which touch or threaten us. It is not only from a distant Gehenna that He saves us, but not less from the hell that opens within us. If we can say with truth, "He brought me up out of the horrible pit" into which my sins cast me, we have a proof of the Divine power of Christ, against which unbelief can urge nothing that touches *our* faith at least. We then know, each of us for himself, "*that the Father has sent the Son to be a Saviour.*" This then is, and ever must be, the proof, greater than any other, of the saving power of Jesus, and it is on this that the real faith of most believers rests. They believe, not because of the words of any man or church, they have seen Christ themselves and know for themselves that He is "*the Saviour.*"

There are, however, another set of proofs, and these outside of ourselves, of the Divine power of

Jesus, of which we can see that St. John is now thinking as one day to become very strong. We know that He, who was once rejected and despised, now reigns over a part of the earth. Men without number now own Him as Lord; everywhere are there places in which He is worshipped; large moneys are spent in His service. But this, very wonderful as it is, fails by itself to prove that He was sent by God. On the same grounds Mohammed and Buddha might claim a like mission. But they seized the world very much as sin itself grasped it. Neither of them has done aught to save it. St. Paul speaks of God as "the Saviour of all men, especially of those that believe,"[1] and He is so in this, that by His power over the souls of men He saves from some evil even those on whom no more than, as it were, Christ's shadow falls.

That this is true is no small proof of His Divine mission. There is much that is disgraceful in Christendom, just as each Christian has in himself many things of which he is ashamed. He is saved by Christ, and yet not saved. Saved, because the living seed of saving truth has been planted in his soul—yet not saved, because the growth from that seed has not reached its full breadth or height, or borne its ripe fruit. So is it with Christianity. So far as it has spread over the earth, it has brought more or less of healing with it. We grieve over

[1] 1 Tim. IV. 10.

the evils which still are to be found beside it, and even in the heart of it. They are so great that when we look at them we are sometimes tempted to doubt the power of the Cross. But we have only to look first at the world as it was before Christ came, or at those parts of it where He is still unknown, and then on the lands in which Christianity is no better than stunted and misshaped, to wonder at the greatness of the saving power there must be in it. We feel that we are allowing ourselves no foolish hope when we look forward to the time when all that great and terrible wilderness, in which just now there are but some spots of green, shall by that power be made to rejoice and blossom as the rose. When it shall be, not by faith, but by sight, that men shall know that *the Father hath sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world.*

Chap. IV. v. 15.

Whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God abideth in him, and he in God.

If, on the ground of our own knowledge, we really believe for ourselves that Jesus is the Son of God, and openly confess this truth, St. John here says that God abides in us and we in Him. We may well believe that, in the days when this Epistle was written, no man who was not moved by the strongest sense of truth could have made this con-

fession. Openly to stand out as a Christian was to run into danger from the heathen, and to hold that Jesus was the Son of God was to range oneself beside those in the church whom the false teachers scouted as weak and mindless. And no doubt it was then, as it always is, that those who are on the world's side in a controversy have the more telling and more easily understood arguments with them. At the present day, and among ourselves at least, there are few dangers in confessing Christ. Indeed, in most places where we find ourselves, it is more easy and safe to confess Jesus with the lips than to deny Him. But to be real, the confession must come from a deeper source. It must spring from a knowledge like that which St. John had, and, that we may share it, he writes his Gospel.

Few people know why they believe the truth about Christ, or any other truth. They have been told it by people whose word about other things they have been wont to take, or they have read about it in a book. But why they should believe the people or the book they have never asked. Therefore, while it is well for the quiet and rest of his soul that every man should be able to give, to all who ask him, a reason for the faith that is in him, it is no mark of unbelief to be unable to do so. His faith may rest on a rock, though he has never dug down to see on what it is founded, not having, it may be, tools for such work. On the other hand,

we may be equally sure that many who can give the best reasons for what they say they believe, have no real faith. There is no rock to uphold its foundations. They have no such knowledge as that on which St. John rested. He believed that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, because he had been able to see in Him a miracle of grace and truth and of mighty power over the souls of men.

Our Lord did not begin His ministry by teaching His disciples, in so many words, that He was the Son of God. It is clear that He took care not to do so. But He watched and longed, we can see, for the day when, through acquaintance with Him, that truth should dawn upon them. At last He asked "Whom do men say that I the Son of Man am?" The answers were many; but when St. Peter made his great confession, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God," Jesus with strong feeling blessed Him, because "flesh and blood had not revealed it to him, but the Father which is in Heaven." Peter had not said over a lesson taught him by the flesh and blood of the lips of man, not even by the lips of Jesus; such a confession Christ would not have prized. It was over a faith that rested on quite other grounds that his Master was glad. What adds much to the force of the lesson thus given us, is that, after the confession had been made, Jesus charged and commanded His apostles that they should "tell no man this thing." Meaning clearly

that, for the present at least, they should not in any form of words set forth this truth to the people. Hence, no doubt, came that to pass, at which many have wondered—that the evangelists and apostles, in all that they wrote, so put this truth that many, who honestly enough look on the New Testament as not untrue, have been able to hold that they could not find it there. Even St. John, one of whose chief aims in this Epistle was to uphold against the Antichrists the Divine greatness of Jesus, does not set it forth in such words as that men should be able to put on them only one sense.

To St. Paul also Gospel truths were not taught in set words. Writing to the Galatians, he says, "Touching the Gospel that was preached by me, it is not after man; for neither did I receive it from a man, nor was I taught it, but it came to me through revelation of Jesus Christ" (Gal. i. 11, 12), and again (v. 16) he speaks of God as revealing His Son not "to" him but "in" him. It is also clear to us if we read his Epistles, in the order in which he wrote them, that this revelation went on step by step throughout his whole life. To these men then the revelation of Gospel truth came, not through words set in order before them, but by the teaching of the Holy Spirit, who took of the things of Christ—that is of the facts of His life and death, and showed to them the real force and meaning of these facts as revealing to them the Divine glory of Jesus.

In all God's revelations to man He has dealt with him in the same way. Nothing staggers the faith of some men so much, or gives to others greater cause to magnify the wisdom of God in the Bible, than His careful purpose in it not to force men into faith through their intellect. The external proofs of its being the Word of God are, we all feel, not so strong as God could have made them. Its truths are not so sharp-edged in the way it puts them, as often, for the sake of peace in the church, we wish they were put. The Scriptures are so written as that men can "wrest them to their own destruction," and there are in them many things, besides those written by St. Paul, which are "hard to be understood."[1] On many points of duty the Bible baffles those who ask from it an unmistakable utterance. It is very clear that God did not intend to give us in it a confession of faith, or a dictionary of duty. He does not demonstrate truth to our intellect, He reveals it to our faith.

And indeed not otherwise could God in His wisdom make Himself known to a being of the manifold nature of man, who is not all intellect, and nothing more. By means of the intellect man works with profit the narrow field of demonstration, but the far wider region of faith yields a richer harvest to him, and calls into use all his powers. The man who cannot believe would speedily be

[1] 2 Peter III. 16.

starved both body and soul, for without faith he would neither dig nor beg, neither search nor pray. Besides, conscience has the right, though not always the power, to rule all within us, and God acknowledges this right by not giving to the intellect a higher place than to the conscience, which thus sits first in judgment on any revelation as from God. Therefore it is that He so tempers that given in the Bible as that the intellect shall not be able, without leave given by the conscience and heart, to lay down laws about its truth. A Bible, with an inspiration fitted to answer these ends, is a work of Divine wisdom far greater than some of its most zealous friends are able to see. They would fain make out the Bible to be a far less wonderful book than it is. They would give it an excellence which is within the reach of human authorship, but deny it that which no cleverness of man could have reached. It is not to them the miracle which it really is.

The lesson of all this, as it bears on our confession of Jesus as the Son of God, is clear. It does not make that confession real to take the words which set forth His Divinity and repeat them with our lips, if we have no better ground for doing so than that the whole church has for ages repeated them. And that not merely because there is no truth about Christ, which has been held always and everywhere, and by all who were of the church, but also and chiefly because a confession made on the ground of

any outward authority, *and on that ground alone,* is not our own confession. It may state what is true, but not what is true to us, not what we feel to be true. All that would be true in such a confession, so far as we have to do with it, would be that we, through faith in others, had borrowed words from them to set forth that of which we ourselves knew nothing. Our testimony would be only hearsay, and as such worthless. Nor can it be otherwise, as St. John here teaches, unless God abide in us and we in Him. Words stir thought in us, and set it to seek and search, but they cannot of themselves put truth into us. They fail to set forth the glory of a sunset, so that one hearing the words that paint it shall see it; how much more the glory of the Son of God! To know what a sunset really is we must see it for ourselves, and so must Christ be seen. When we have once beheld Him we may take the words which men of old chose and set in order to describe Him whom they saw. They are, it may well be, better words than any we could find for ourselves, for they are the result of manifold trials, whereby it was sought to find the best, and these we may use as our confession. But we cannot by them put into the minds of others what we think of Christ, unless they too have seen Him and felt that our words are what they as well as we would wish to use, both grieving that the words are too weak for the task we give them. Clearly, unless Christ be known to

us otherwise than by the words of flesh and blood—unless He be revealed *in us,* as He was *in* St. Paul, by the Father—unless the Holy Spirit take of the things of Christ and show them to us, our confession will not be of Christ; it will mean nothing more than that for some reason we choose to utter words which we have been told others used to describe Him whom they knew, but whom we do not know. Before Christ can be truthfully confessed, we must ourselves see and value the glory of His character and work, we must ourselves feel His power to save. It is with the *heart* man must believe before with the mouth confession can be made.[1]

If, then, with knowledge of the facts of Christ's life and of their meaning we have said, "Whom have I in heaven but Thee, and there is none upon earth that I desire beside Thee. My flesh and my heart faileth, but Thou art the strength of my heart and my portion for ever"—If we have so seen Christ as to long with heart and soul ever to be able to say this, then will our confession be a true one when we say, He is my God. If we thus confess Him with our lips, it is certain that we shall not deny him in our lives. Men will take knowledge of us that we have been with Jesus, and they will best do so, St. John has taught us, if we confess our faith in Jesus as the Son of God by having love one to another.

[1] Romans X. 10.

CHAP. IV. v. 16.

And we know and have believed the love which God hath in us. God is love; and he that abideth in love abideth in God, and God abideth in Him.

St. John takes for granted that he, and those also to whom he was writing, could truthfully make the great confession that Jesus is the Son of God. For he says, "*We know and have believed the love which God hath in us.*" The only begotten Son coming to us, and yet resting in the bosom of the Father, He hath made clear to us the love of God towards us. But the Apostle does not say *towards* us, or *for* us, but "*in*" us. This may mean the love of God "in our case" (as the margin of the Revised Version has it), but it seems to have a further sense. We have known this love of God in us, among us, as a body of men, and also in each one of us. Each of us, whether he looks round on the church or looks within himself, has seen the love of God seeking our welfare, and working the best good in us and for us. Just as in v. 14, Christ was seen to be an actual Saviour, here the love which sent Christ is seen to go along with Him, having a great power which manifests itself clearly. It is seen in acts of watchfulness, of thoughtful wisdom, and of care in giving and fostering spiritual life. It has such

loving strength, as we see on earth tending a sick bed, or making ready with a large and open hand for a returning prodigal. St. John sees this in all that has happened to his own soul and to the church, just as St. Paul sees Christ to be *in* the Colossians "the hope of glory" (Col. i. 27): Christ so working among them, and in each of them, as that one day even they, corrupt and degraded as they have been, will reach the glory of being like Him.

It is this sight of the love of God guiding and giving force to a power which is making all things new within us, which leads us not only to ever fresh wonder at what God can do, but gives us also a clear sense of His personality, and awakens within us a thankful and tender love for Him as our Father. In the great universe we lose sight of God as a Being having a Heart and Will. There He may be nothing else than Energy showing itself in the working of manifold forces. But we feel keenly that God is, when He comes into the world of the soul, which, small as it seems, is yet, by reason of its everlastingness and its bearing the image and likeness of God, greater, not only to ourselves, but in itself, than the whole universe of matter. How manifest is God when He works there, and all for our good; making the hard heart soft; giving us, instead of the numbness of death, the quick feeling that belongs to the spiritual life, or, as St. John so often puts it, a love—an unselfishness—like that of

God; changing what had before been at best a rare impulse into an abiding and never idle principle.

The man who thus abides in love, St. John goes on to say, "*Abideth in God and God abideth in him.*" Words very like these have been already before us (in Chap. III. 24), where as here they express the closest union and fellowship betwixt God and man. It pleases the Apostle much to dwell on this fellowship, and to tell us again and again who he is and what he does who is thus so close to God. He "keepeth the commandments of God" (III. 24). To him "is given of the Spirit of God" (IV. 13). He "confesseth that Jesus is the Son of God" (IV. 15), and "he abideth in love" (IV. 16). By these tokens is the true Christian marked. Were it not that we know the tender love of God breaketh not the bruised reed nor quenches the smoking flax, no one of us reading this could take to himself that name.

But why is it that the man who abideth in love abideth in God? The Apostle answers because "*God is love.*" Strange words indeed if we think of them—"*God is Love,*" therefore "*he that abides in love abides in God.*" St. John here repeats the words of Chap. IV. 16—the greatest that a man ever wrote—"*God is Love.*" As we read them many thoughts show themselves only to pass away, dimly seen and shapeless, yet very great, for *that* we can

see. They may, one day perhaps, become inmates with us; but as it is, they clearly belong to another sphere, and cannot live so as to grow into shape, within the closeness of minds narrow as ours are now. It seems irreverent and dangerous to have more to do with these words than as we hear them to adore Him of whom they are true. Like the ark of God around which all Israel rejoiced, we may not touch them with such hands as ours. It is enough for us to see the pledge of boundless generosity which they bring to us.

If we deal with them at all, perhaps our first care must be not to change the order of them, as if they taught that *love is God*. The danger in such a change is really great. For in the midst of the never-ending hopelessness of trying to think worthily of the nature of a Being who is infinite, eternal, unchangeable, unconditioned, there is a way of escape seen by many, and taken by some. It is to look on what we call God simply as a great law, which may be seen to rule the universe of feeling and action, as it is known to us; a law in the spiritual world, like that of gravitation in the world of matter; a tendency ever active, and everywhere making itself felt. We cannot go from its presence, or hide ourselves from it. If we take the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, there that law finds us, nor are we hidden from it by the darkness. To us therefore it is a principle

ever to be remembered and acted upon. If we cannot escape it, neither dare we set ourselves against it. Pain and misery come to those who forget it; happiness to those who keep it in mind. He that slights it wrongs his own soul; they that hate it love death.

This great law in the spiritual world—this great principle—is the law of love. Not without a certain dignity is it able to take the place of God. The temptation therefore to many is great to put this intelligible principle in the place of God Himself. For it is noble, and high, and beautiful. It can be admired with a feeling so strong as to be almost worship. It can be trusted as a perfect and unfailing guide through the doubtful paths of life, and it brings with it a sure reward to those who yield to its sway. This no doubt is much, yet how short a way does it go to meet the cravings of the soul. For a law—a principle—can have no sympathy with us; it cannot love us, it cannot pardon us, it cannot go aside to help us. It has no heart to which our heart can cling. It may save us from doing the foolish and deadly thing, but it cannot move to rescue us from the miseries which follow if we do it. It has neither power nor will to save us. Like Wisdom in the book of Proverbs—and what is it but that Wisdom?—it "laughs at our calamity and mocks when our fear cometh." It leaves us hopelessly to "eat the fruit

of our own way, and to be filled with our own devices." It is true, that when we think of God, we may well say, "How little a portion can we see of Him"; but how precious is that little, when we can say with St. John, "*We know and have believed the love which God hath in us*"—when it is a fact in our own lives that He, instead of mocking at our calamity, answered when we called, and regarded when we stretched out our hands to Him, carrying ever out towards us the great principle we have seen to be so good—forgiving, helping, guiding us, as we, in fellowship with Him, pardon and help and guide each other. How does it fill the spiritual universe with light when we know that in it is a Heart and a Will—that there is a Living God and that He is Love. Yet is it true that but for Christ we could never have been sure of this. In a strange but true sense Christ saves us from the curse of a mere natural law.

Chap. IV. v. 17.

Herein is love made perfect with us, that we may have boldness in the day of judgment; because as He is, even so are we in this world.

St. John, led on by what he has last said, now tells us that if we abide in love—that is to say, if we keep up in our hearts and in our lives a Godlike unselfishness—then that love, when through closest

fellowship with God it has reached perfection (He working in us and with us), will give us, as a proof of its being perfect, "*boldness in the day of judgment.*"

To this word "*judgment*" we often give a narrow meaning. We think of it as belonging to a court of law, with all its forms. But indeed a judgment is that, whatever it may be, which enables us to set the wise apart from the foolish, the useful from the useless, the helpful from the hurtful, the good from the bad. Thus it is that most of the things which happen to us are nothing else than judgments on things once said or done by us. In these sayings and doings, our end was some pleasure or profit to ourselves or to others. But even though we thought well about them, we could not, apart from God's teaching, be quite sure whether they would do good or harm. This is no trifling fact, for, though we often forget it, words or deeds, once gone from us, pass quite beyond our grasp, and cannot be recalled. They become, as it were, living and active beings who never die—who somewhere and some day will do something, we know not what, for us or against us. Or they are as seeds dropped into the ground by us, not to be gathered thence, which, whether we watch them or forget them, will sooner or later grow up and produce, possibly to our dismay, their proper fruit. At last the day comes when their fruit is ripe, and that is to us a

day of judgment. It has brought out the true character of our word or deed. It has, as it were, pronounced sentence on it, as wise or foolish, as good or bad. Every one knows how true this is of all the greater things he does, as when he changes his home, or goes into partnership, or invests his money. The day comes when judgment will be given on these acts by the course of events, which tells him with unfeeling gravity, sometimes with a bitter irony, whether he had been wise and good, or foolish and bad. Each man's work is thus made manifest of what kind it is; the day declares it. This is true, not only of what we thought our greater acts or words, but of all things we ever said or did; for not one of them is without an issue, which, if we can look back from it so as to see whence it came, will give on some old act of ours a judgment often very startling.

Although these judgments seem to come simply in the due course of events, they are in the truest sense the judgments of God, since it is by His care that the laws which rule all that is least, as well as all that is greatest in the universe, take their inevitable way. Without Him "not a sparrow falleth to the ground," and it is this that we mean when we speak of His Providence.

Great events, then, marking to us never-to-be-forgotten days, are not God's only judgments upon us; but everything that happens to us gives sen-

tence on something we once did or said, unveiling the real character of our past so clearly that, if on the one hand we can see that some things we did in it were wise, only folly or pride can hide from us, on the other hand, how full of mistakes and sins we had made it. No doubt these judgments sometimes lose their clearness through those fateful laws which leave no man to stand alone in the world, but which, by many ties, bind him for good or evil to others both living and dead. But our conscience and memory ever help us to keep apart the judgments given on ourselves from those which point to others. And if we see that some misery that falls to us, or some good we enjoy, has its root in a parent or forefather, this truth will not come to us in vain if it reminds us that we cannot live or die to ourselves alone, and that not our own future only, but in part that of our children also and our friends, is in our hands for good or evil. Let us thank God that this law of heredity, awful as it is when it visits the iniquities of the fathers upon the children, carries with it also a large and far-reaching blessing to the thousands of those who love God and keep His commandments.

When we thus think of judgments we see that we ought not to give that name to an evil, however startling, which is clearly joined by no link that we can see to anything done by those to whom it has happened. Our Lord with Divine wisdom

warns us against thinking that they on whom the tower at Siloam fell were greater sinners than others in Jerusalem. The judgment was not on them, but on the men who built the tower, as having been unskilful or dishonest, though there may have been a judgment also on those who were killed for having been recklessly in the place where the tower could fall upon them. The final judgment on what we have done may be long put off; but sooner or later it will be given.

If, then, this is true, we may well ask if by any means we can make ourselves sure that the sentence will be for us, and not against us. The words of St. John now before us have a further scope, but they may first answer this question. If we abide in love, if we keep up in our hearts and in our lives a true unselfishness, we may have confidence in any day of judgment. We may be sure that any act wrought in Christlike love will, by what comes of it, have, some time or other, a favourable judgment given on it. Heavenly Wisdom, who is none other than righteousness, is always "justified by her children," that is, not perhaps by what happens soon, but by what happens sometime; while a deed of selfishness, though it may at the first seem very wise, will in the end be covered with the shame of folly by the evil which is sure to come of it. Our actions may certainly not be seen at first in their true character, as when in some holy cause a man

loses his liberty, and all that he has on earth. It may not be till years have passed that such a loss is clearly swallowed up by a far more exceeding gain. The children of God will always find that, however great the sorrow may be with which they sow in their lives the precious seed of love to God and to man, the time will come when they will return "with joy, bringing their sheaves with them."

There are some acts which, by the gain they at once bring, seem to be favourably judged, and yet the end of them is not merely loss, but death. That which is lost may be found, but spiritual death, apart from a miracle of grace, is the end of all hope. It is this dreadful issue of some acts, as we are used to think, which sets them apart under the name of sins. A man may set at nought the fixed laws laid by God on matter, or commerce, or health, as when he tries to leap too high a fence, or buys in a falling market, or eats a poisonous fruit; and, though he may thus lose much, his soul need be nothing the worse, nay, it may be all the better. But if he breaks through the line of strict justice, and passes, as St. John would put it, into the region of no love or hate, and so injures his neighbour, he enters into and abides in death. This then is the question to be settled in the greater days of judgment. Is the man spiritually dead or alive? For there are such greater days as time goes on.

Days in which judgment is passed, not on one act or on a few, but upon the whole of the life we have spent, so that we know thenceforth that we have gained what never can be lost, or lost all, and perhaps ourselves too. On such a day a hand, not our own, opens the great book of our memory, and out of that book we must judge ourselves with "a judgment according to the truth," "our conscience also bearing witness, and our thoughts one with another accusing or else excusing us."[1]

But such days are but foretastes or preludes of that greatest day to which each of us must come after we are dead. The day of the Lord, *the* day of judgment, when God will judge the secrets of all men by the great test of their having loved or disliked Jesus Christ; when, to settle the question whether we really were of Him, the whole of our lives, with all we did in them, will be opened up, and judgment passed on what we had been, and on what we came to be—a day the very thought of which fills us with a strained anxiety. Shall we then as living souls be gathered close to God, or as dead souls be, as it were, buried out of His sight? Can that anxiety be changed into joyful hope? Can this fear be cast out? This is the very question which St. John here answers. If, he says, we are abiding in love, if that love has been made perfect in us, then we may have confidence.

[1] Romans II. 15.

This that St. John says is all the more striking that we may have looked for quite another reply. For is it not true that the only ground of boldness for us on that day is the promise of God to us in Christ, that if we believe in Him, we shall for His sake be acquitted? This is indeed true. But what St. John takes for granted here as elsewhere is, that they to whom he is writing do believe and are pardoned, and have already a spiritual life which is eternal. These are to him the first principles of Christ, beyond which he wishes us to press onwards. For he knew that a man may have a strong ground of hope, and yet be unable to take his stand upon it. It is easy to feel, while our life is being spent in unbroken quiet, that through Christ we are sure of heaven, but how tense will be the strain on our hope as we draw near the judgment seat when we see, as it were, the great book being opened in which all our deeds and words and thoughts are written. When in an hour of solemn thought that day becomes real to us as if we had reached the morning of it, and we try to steady our souls by resting them on the faithfulness of God, the help to faith is great if we feel that God is not only faithful but loving. If that be clear to us we can look up and take heart. But St. John has just told us that we cannot feel the love of God to be real unless we have in our own hearts a love that is like it. It is only, he says, when we love others

as God loves us that we can believe that such as we are can be loved by Him, and thus be able to think of the judgment day with a boldness which the unforgiving spirit can never feel. It is this truth which lies behind the great saying of Christ, that "if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive you your trespasses." We shall not be forgiven, neither dare we think of ourselves as forgiven, unless, indeed, we are believing in a pitiless God who therefore has fellowship with the pitiless and unforgiving.

It is perhaps by a course straighter than this that St. John would have us reach boldness in that great day. If we be abiding in love, God has already bestowed on us the best gift which He has for His children. He cannot cast from Him, as dead, the souls which He Himself has quickened into life, or banish from His presence hearts full of love like His own. "Her sins," said Christ of a sinful woman, "are forgiven her, for she loved much."[1] Words to which a false sense may easily be given, but which should not therefore be set aside. To have that love is to be in His presence, to banish from it would be the strange act of destroying that love. St. John feels that this could never be. Even if the good work in us be but begun, he is confident of this very thing, that God will perfect it. Such a bond as that of even a weak love to

[1] Luke VII. 47.

Him neither death nor life nor things to come could ever loose.

We see, from the last words of the verse, that it is this St. John is feeling. We in this world are, he says, as Christ is. We Christians here on earth are like Christ as He is in heaven. We are here while He has passed hence. But in so far as we have risen to the height of love, and thus have become like Him in character, are we like Him also in being already in heaven. For as heaven is a place, so is it a state of the soul, and in the state, rather than in the place, the happiness lies of those who are in it. They already have the life that is eternal. They already belong to God as His own. Though in the world, they are no longer of it, and it is the will of their Lord that they shall be with Him where He is. The man then who can see this to be true—that "*as Christ is so are we in this world,*" in all things which have but to be perfected, and which one day shall be perfected so as to make our state that of the highest heaven—will surely have boldness in the day of judgment. With such thoughts are mingled no forebodings of sorrow, they are themselves the foretastes of eternal joy.

CHAP. IV. v. 18.

There is no fear in love: but perfect love casteth out fear, because fear hath punishment; and he that feareth is not made perfect in love.

A perfect faith in God should save us all from a fear that hath torment. But we are not all thus saved. The ears of many of us are haunted by the words, "Cast ye the unprofitable servant into outer darkness." If we believe St. John, it is to our selfishness—to our want of love for others—that we owe this fear, for "*perfect love casteth out fear.*" The more selfish we are, the harder is it for us to believe in the sacrifice of Christ; and the more that with anger or sullen hate we brood over wrongs done to ourselves do we think that God, who has all power of vengeance, will use it on us, who have wronged Him. Selfishness, or hatred as St. John calls it, is pitiless to a fallen enemy, and the man in whom it abides judges God by himself. It does not seem to him God's strange work to cast a creature into outer darkness, there to wail for evermore. He himself would treat in that very way, if he could, one who had treated him as he has treated God, and so he cannot understand God's pity, and His desire to forgive. Thus it is, that if selfishness be perfect in any man, he can have no boldness in the day of judgment, for perfect selfishness casteth

out hope; full grown it bringeth forth despair, and despair is in a sense spiritual death.

Thus it is, St. John thinks, that in proportion to our want of love to each other will be our dread of the day of judgment. On the other hand, our love to others, so far as we reach it, makes us understand the feeling of God for us. For as we are in this world so does He seem to us. If we would hurt no one, and cease to help the wretched only when they will not let themselves be helped; if it be worse to us than bodily pain to hear any one wailing, we are sure that it must be so with God, since "*He is greater than our hearts*"—greater in pity and in love than we are. He that spared not His Own Son that we might not die can take no pleasure in our death. If His justice and His truth do not hinder Him (and that they cannot do now that Christ has died for us all), He will rejoice in making us happy. Wilfulness and love of sin may set at nought His pity, but the heart that is perfect in love neither loves sin nor is wilful. God Himself has cast these evils out of it, and with them fear also is gone. The soul no longer dreads, it longs for the day when it shall appear before God. Such utter casting out of fear has been seen on earth when a just soul, ripened by faith and love to dwell with God, triumphs in full sight of death and judgment. Fearlessness grows with love.

There is another point from which this truth may

be seen. Love is, with St. John, forgetfulness of self in thinking of another; but fear thinks only of self, and forgets all others. So if we forget ourselves in thinking of another, we cannot be afraid. Cowardly animals have no fear for themselves when their young are threatened. There is nothing a mother will not face for the sake of her child; and in all deeds of true heroism, it is love, or forgetfulness of self, that casts out fear. So the soul that truly loves God loses the spirit of bondage to fear, whether in working for Him now, or in thinking of being brought before Him hereafter in judgment. It is so filled and taken up with the love of God that there is no room in it for care about self. It is so too with love to our neighbour. The man who is full of pity for those around him, because a pestilence has seized them, loses all fear of deadly taint in the hour that he busies himself in tending them. A work of love leaves no room for fear.

That fearlessness, however, may be perfect, love must be perfect. It is a perfect love that casteth out all fear, and not love in its beginnings and first state of weakness. Fear is driven out before it as it grows. It has not its full strength at once. "The soul at first has neither fear nor love, then comes fear and no love, next love and fear together, but at last love and no fear" (Bengel). Thus fear and love may live together in a Christian soul; neither has strength enough to cast out the other,

and fear will have a lodging there so long as a trace of selfishness is left behind. "We have indeed not attained, neither are we already perfect."

Meanwhile, fear is not useless. It calls to repentance, and thus often makes straight the way for love, as John the Baptist for Christ. Fear puts an end to that easy thoughtlessness which is so pleasant, but so unsafe. It forces on us questionings about God and the future, whence comes to us the knowledge of the true, and with it love to Him who is true, and this waxes in strength until at last it casts out fear, which all the while was becoming weaker as the other was gaining strength.

The word "*punishment,*" used by the Revised Version in place of "*torment,*" gives us yet another view of this truth. "*Fear,*" St. John says, "*hath punishment.*" There must therefore be sin in the source of fear, as indeed there is, since it springs out of selfishness, of which fear is the fitting punishment or torment which follows it. Self-love takes many forms, and with them vary the punishments of self-love. But in all of them fear has a part. A dread of the future, sinking the soul, from a weary dulness and sense of the utter emptiness of all joy, downwards and still down to a sleepless dread in which men have been seen seeking an hour's forgetfulness in a mad, vain grasping at strange pleasures. We know how void of hope the life becomes of a man who, through his wealth or

power, has been able to give the rein to his lust or selfish fancy—how he wearies of life, and yet dreads death. History tells us many awful stories of the wretchedness of some who, being raised above all law, have been able to live only for themselves. It is more than one can bear to feel, as we read some books, what the spiritual hell is into which men have cast themselves by seeking through life no happiness but their own. Few fall so deep as this, for few can give unbridled course to their selfishness. Want of wealth, or of power, or of time, acts as a drag on their downward rush. This, surely, is of the goodness of God, who thus makes less swift the fall of man into "the dreadful pit." Here can be seen a bright side to needful toil, and even to want. After man had sinned, the ground was cursed "for his sake," for his real good; and in proportion as it is anywhere cursed seems to be his hardihood of body and heart. But along with all selfishness, be it much or little, comes, as its due punishment, some loss of hope, some inroad of fear, which ceases when, through the grace of God, the soul is filled with a love to which belongs not punishment, but the prize of a living hope.

We have seen that the fear which love casts out is fear for oneself—the fear of being hurt. But there is another fear which increases with love, namely, the fear of hurting, the fear of bringing disgrace on the name or cause of God, the fear of

wronging our neighbour, or of failing to do good to him. That fear hath no punishment; it tendeth, or rather belongeth, to life, and it grows with all that is good in us. There is indeed a true happiness in the godly fear with which the man, saved by love from all dread of the day of judgment, serves God, and even in the fear for the future of his fellow-men, which leads him, full of a faith which waits patiently on God, to become all things to all men that he may save some.

Chap. IV. vv. 19-21.

We love, because He first loved us. If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, cannot love God whom he hath not seen. And this commandment have we from Him, that he who loveth God love his brother also.

Too often men, who call themselves Christians, think that love to God and love to our neighbour may be kept apart—that if we have the one we do not need the other. Thus far St. John has forgotten neither, but he has taken them up one after the other. Now, however, fearing lest we should think that the love we owe to God, and the love we owe to our fellow-men are not the same, he will speak of love by itself, without saying to whom it goes out. When he has done this he will then show

that love to God and love to our neighbour always go together. Our Authorized Version hides this thought, following an old mistake of those who made copies of the Greek text. The revisers have put this right by leaving out the words "*of God,*" and giving us only "*we love, because God first loved us.*" What St. John then wishes to teach us is, that we love not God alone, or man alone, but that we can have love either to God or to man, or to both, only because God first loved us. St. John is thinking of that state of soul, meant by us, when we say, "We love," as being the same whether it is God or man that is loved.

Now, as we are wont to think about love, it is not easy to see at once that in this he is right. We are ready to say—Do we then love God with the same sort of love which we feel towards our neighbours or friends? But let us carefully keep in mind that love, as St. John thinks of it, may be fondness, but is not always fondness or even liking. It may warm into a passionate devotion; but what must ever be found in it, and which is by itself love, is simply a principle—a sense of duty. Indeed, to be rightly called love, it may be nothing else, as we have seen, than that righteousness which admits all the claims which others have, not only on our sense of justice, but also on our pity.

St. John draws a line—the line of simple justice. On the one side of it is selfishness or hate, on the

other side unselfishness, and to dwell on that side is to love, whether it be God or man. Love, whether with or without strong feeling to uphold it in its working, is the wish to give rather than to take, to help and not to hurt, to minister not to be ministered to. This is love. The love of Christ for us; the love of God. It was once ours also when man was at first made in the image of God, and in it lay his innocence and state of good. But in this honour man abode not, but became like the beasts that perish; the law of whose life being founded, as it seems, on the longer life of those fittest to live, is, at least when they are in a state of nature, one of perfect selfishness, like that of plants, which always kill each other if they can grow better by doing so. For if we think of any sin into which man falls, we see that what makes it a sin is that in it he has loved himself more than some other, whether that other be God or man. It was thus that man ceased to bear the image of God, by losing the loving heart. He thus also lost his guide to happiness, which without love he cannot find. Hence the misery which is so great in the earth—the whole creation groaning and travailing in pain, along with man. Nor can man ever be happy unless he gains again that power to love which was his, when at the first he was made by God.

It was this wretchedness of man that moved the pitying love of God to rescue him from selfishness

and bring him back to love, thus to renew in him His own image—in short, to save him. The Gospel tells us how this was done. The whole work of Christ, past and present—His coming in the flesh, His pains, His death, His example, His rising again from the dead, His going back to heaven, His pleading with God for us, and the gift of the Holy Spirit, were all needed to bring back to the soul the unselfish, pitying, helping, loving spirit, which it had lost. We are not able to put that spirit into ourselves or into others. All that man can do—and he has tried in a thousand ways to keep himself from being hurt by the self-love of his fellows—has been done in vain. So that if that spirit of Godlike love is ours: if we have in us but the beginning of the same mind which was in Christ, we owe it to God. If we love, it is "*because God first loved us.*" This then is the great lesson which the Apostle would here teach us. If the power of selfishness be broken within us; if our care is set on the good of others; if the honour of God and the good of our brethren be dearer to us than our own pleasure; if we are loving our neighbour in any measure as God loved us; if we are being saved from the bottomless pit of self-pleasing, it is God who is saving us; if we love, it is "because God first loved us."

St. John now goes on to show how no man can truly love God who does not love his brother also.

If the heart be truly unselfish its love will not go forth to God alone. This state of heart is indeed the gift of God, His best gift, and it is to His love we owe it, but He did not bestow it so as that He alone should be served by it. St. John leads up to this by laying down a truth, which no one can gainsay. "*If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar.*"

There can be no doubt that one whose heart is full of cursing and bitterness towards his neighbour is not in a fit state for loving God. But men have not always felt this to be true. For they have thought of God as one who hates with a bitterness like their own. They have worshipped, under the name of God, a being gloomy and harsh. Even with the Gospel before them they have said of God —He is darkness, and with Him there is no light. With such a God, souls wrathful and malignant can have fellowship of a kind, because He is darkness and not light. But if we know that God is of unbounded pity and love, we feel that if we are walking in hatred we can have no fellowship with Him; our souls, like night-birds, fly before the brightness of Him. He is against us, not for us, and we can have no love for Him.

But with St. John, hate, as we have seen, is simply want of love, so that what he means here is that if we see a brother in want or wretchedness, or danger, or sin, and are not moved to help him,

we are not speaking the truth if we say we love God. We need not have any dislike to the unhappy man, or even be troubled by the feeling that we ought to help him. If our heart be shut against him, so that we do nothing for him, or as little as we can, then also is it certain that we are not loving God. For a closed heart can have no fellowship with God, from whose open heart pitying love came forth at so great a cost to those who had on Him no claim but that of their misery. We never really love those who do some good work which, not our weakness, but our wilfulness has let alone. They put us to shame, they wound our self love. So when we feel that God is doing this, we cannot love Him. Or if we try to do so, it is by making ourselves believe that His love is as narrow and bounded as our own. To have true fellowship with the God and Father of Jesus Christ, there must be in us a love for our brother which longs to be rich in mercy as God is, and which grieves over our shortcomings in it as sins. We cannot so much as long to love God, if we are not longing to love our brother. We cannot grieve over our want of love to God, if we do not also grieve over our hardness of heart when our brother's need is before us. For, saith the Apostle, "*If we love not our brother whom we have seen, we cannot love God whom we have not seen.*"

St. John, of course, does not mean by this that

we cannot love God, merely because He is out of our sight. He knew, as we do, that we can warmly love the absent or the dead. But he knew that if on the one side we are more vexed by those beside us than by any who are far from us, on the other side we are more nearly touched by the claims of those who are before our eyes than of those who are known to us only by faith. "The eye affecteth the heart." Sight forces its objects upon us; so that to a truly unselfish man it is less easy to be moved by the claims of God, or to be touched by the sorrows borne by Christ for us, than by some incomparably smaller kindness done to us, or sacrifices made for us, here and to-day. This may seem a strange truth. Can it be that our neighbour, with all his faults, is more easily loved than the perfect God? But again must it be kept in mind what St. John means by love. It is simply unselfish feeling. It is the caring for another more than for ourselves. It is the fixed wish to help our neighbour, to do all we can for him in his need. In place of this many put, as if nothing else were love, a certain gush or outburst of feeling, which, good as it is when it fulfils its proper work of helping unselfishness in some hard or weary task, is worse than useless when the beginning and end of it is within itself. We see this very clearly when St. James, in his Epistle, shows us the man who has nothing but fine feelings and good words to give to

the brother or sister who is in lack of daily food. His shame is that there was surely something he could have done for them.

But men say—What can we do for God? What else can we give Him but feeling? We cannot help Him or enrich Him; we can only give Him our hearts—nothing more. These seem good words, yet they never could be spoken by one who truly loved God. Love cannot rest in doing nothing. It may indeed at a time find nothing to do; but this grieves it, and it ceases not to watch till a way be opened for service and sacrifice. This is of the very nature of love, so that without it there is not any true love. A man, therefore, who is at ease, and rests on a mere feeling towards God which he calls love, is surely deceiving himself. There is a hope of gain, of pleasure, of shelter, of safety, giving rise to a desire to be near a Being who can give us these, which in truth is pure selfishness, but which we are glad to call love, because we know we ought to love, and we have nothing better than this counterfeit wherewith to pay what we owe. No doubt the gifts which come to us from another—the safety he gives us, the shelter we have beside him—have something to do with a real love for him. For it is often by means of these that we come to see what manner of man he is. They manifest him to us. But still the question must ever be asked, when we have to do with one who is kind to

us, whether it is his gifts or himself that we are loving. Might it not please us much if the gifts came without the giver, or with a giver of quite another kind? Such questions may well be put by the man who says "I love God," if for no other reason than that he may see that he must not be too sure that he is loving God.

We have already seen that much that is taken for love to God is not really love to Him, but to something about Him which, taken by itself, serves our pride, or sloth, or even our sinfulness. Did we know Him better—were the whole of His character forced on us—love for Him would not be so easily felt. We cannot so readily shut out of our view what displeases us in our brother whom we see; therefore we think that it is more easy to love God. We must indeed be very thoroughly renewed in the spirit of our minds before souls such as ours, drawn at first towards God by the gifts we see in His hand, can behold and understand the lofty holiness and justice and truth and purity that are His, and lead Him often to acts which pain us, and adore Him for these as well as for the boundless generosity of His love. From the fellow-feeling of the best of us, a Being thus "fearful in praises" is far further off than any brother could be. So that our love, if it rises as high as to God, must first have reached and enfolded our fellow-men. The true unselfish man on his way to the temple,

there to offer costly gifts, cannot pass, unnoticed and unhelped, the Lazarus who is lying at his door.

But there are those who not only deny this, but who think and speak as if it were a Christian duty to love no one except God; as if a mother's love to her child were almost a sin against God; as if a noble pity for our brethren, sunk in want or overburdened with toil, led the soul away from Him. But without this love to our brethren, love to God cannot be. God indeed, above all beings, has a claim upon us, for His has all the force of justice. But it is through love to our fellow-men that He trains us to the higher love to Himself. The lower lesson must be learned first. Besides, if, loving Him, we wish to obey Him, the one duty with which, above all others, He charges us is "*that he who loveth God love his brother also.*"

Chap. V. v. 1.

Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is begotten of God: and whosoever loveth Him that begat loveth Him also that is begotten of Him.

St. John has taught us that we are to treat all men with a noble self-sacrificing love. We are in all ways to help and in no wise to hurt a human being, whatever be his race or his rank, whatever may be our feeling towards him, or his past treat-

ment of us, whatever it may cost us in loss of gain, or in giving up what we have got. But among our fellow-men there are some who belong to the same country, the same village, the same household with ourselves. We have shared with them gladness and sorrow, we have worked together and rested together. They are bound to us by many ties which draw us towards them. It is quite right that we should care for them in the first place. The closest to us are our brethren, the children of the same father. But if we are Christians God also is our Father. To our earthly parents we owe it that we are living men, to God that we are living souls. The second birth—this being born again "Not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, but of God," was early taught by our Lord as giving life to the spirit of man. It makes him a new creature, it brings him out of darkness and bondage into light and liberty, he becomes a "fellow-citizen with the saints and of the household of God." The bonds then which join the sons and daughters of an earthly family draw together all the children of God. But surely with greater strength. For on earth the sons of the same father are sometimes not drawn to each other. In their ways of thinking and feeling, in their aims and pursuits, they are often strangely unlike. So that we sometimes find "a friend who sticketh closer than a brother." But the children of God are thought by St. John to be

all formed after the same image, all dwelt in by the same Spirit, all having the same ends in view, all filled with the same hope, all liable to the same dangers. There is nothing to keep them asunder, but very much to draw them close together. Above all, every one of them loves the same Father, with whom they are in closest fellowship, being with Him in the light. Surely then, thus loving "*Him who begat,*" they will love each other who are "*begotten of Him.*" Thus clearly it ought to be, and thus St. John, who is always thinking of the full Christian life, takes for granted that it must be.

But, as we all know, this dream of the Apostle does not tally with the facts of the Christian life. It is a sad truth that, among those who are of the household of faith, there is often found a keenness of dislike, a bitterness of wrath, such as perhaps no other men on earth have felt for each other. The children of God have not waited for fire from heaven to burn up their brethren; they have been in haste to make sure work by kindling it on earth. No doubt when this is done the name of brethren is denied to those who suffer, and perhaps as often by them to those who cause the suffering. Though at one on all the greater truths, they have broken with each other only about those that are least, yet over these they have fought to the death, treating with scorn each other's claims to be called children of God. Each is proved to the other to be a child

of the devil by the deadly falsehoods, as they call them, which they hold. How seldom could this, or anything like it, be felt, if men would only listen to these words of St. John. "*Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is born of God.*"

In the first page of his Gospel St. John had written that Christ gives the right to become children of God to those who "believe in His name." All such, he says, are born of God, and already in this Epistle he has told us, that "every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God," and that "whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God abideth in him and he in God." No words can make the truth more plain, which forbids us to deny the name of Christian to any one who believes in the Divine Sonship of Christ.

But are we therefore not to care whether or not other truths are held by our fellow Christians? Now we all know that there is not any truth, which we believe, even though it be as a jot or a tittle, which can be denied by us without sin. We must at every cost *to ourselves* uphold every and any truth which we know to be a truth; and we set truth at nought if we make nothing of any error, clearly seen by us to be a real error, into which a brother has fallen. But, however strongly we may wish to clear his mind, we have no right to force him to make any sacrifice for aught which he does

not himself see to be true. We are bound to think him as honest as we know ourselves to be. We may do all that we wisely can to prove to him that he is wrong; but we are traitors to truth if we try, either by threats or by bribes, by punishments or rewards, to tempt him to the sin of calling that true which seems to him untrue. But to deny to him the name of Christian—to treat him as a heathen man or a publican—because in some things he followeth not with us, is at once to threaten and to bribe him. It is to do all we can to make him a far worse man than he could be with all his errors, for it is to try to make him false. If the Divine glory of Christ has clearly shone into his heart we dare not treat him otherwise than as a brother. For, as we have already seen, if the sense of that be real, and not a question of words only, with him and with us, we have both of us seen, and are seeing, in the character of Christ, a glory as of the Highest and the Best—the glory of God. We have both of us got rid of false ideas of glory, both have been able to see what is highest and best, and thus have fellowship in all that is greatest with the Father and with one another. Unless we have reached this point, we are neither of us believing in St. John's sense of the word, that Jesus is the Christ. We are only saying that we believe. We are not really begotten of God. We are taking to ourselves a name to which He has given us no title. In which

case we have no fellowship with each other, and no love.

It is hard indeed for many to see that in the spiritual world words are not of much value. It is not what we say, but what we do, that shows what we are. It is "not in word, neither with the tongue," that we are to love, but "in deed and in truth" (Chap. III. 17, 18).

It is here that we find the point of real consent between what St. John says in this place and what he has already said about the birth of the soul from God. Here we find the words, "*He that believeth that Jesus is the Christ is begotten of God.*" There (Chap. II. 29), "*Ye know that every one that doeth righteousness is begotten of Him.*" Belief in Christ as the Son of God cannot be disjoined from the doing of righteousness. The one is the proof of the reality of the other, which without it cannot be. For the unrighteous man, as St. John has showed us, cannot know God, and can therefore put no real sense on the words—"*the Son of God.*" He may use the words, but he knows not what he says, for they can be used with understanding only by one who has become a child of God through the Spirit which God hath given him, who, having taught him to love, hath enabled him to know God (Chap. IV. 7).

On these points, however, which bear closely on what is before us, enough has already been said;

only it is clear that St. John would have us see that the bitter, angry partizan cannot know God, or understand the meaning of the words which set forth Christ as Divine. And, further, that if, in a man who says that he beholds in Jesus a Divine glory, we mark a love, an unselfishness, a righteousness of the kind that belonged to Christ, we, if we ourselves be true children of God, will not only hail him as a brother Christian, we will also love him for his likeness in chiefest things to our Heavenly Father, even if in many things of creed and worship he is not at one with us.

Are the words then useless which make up a Confession of Faith? By no means. Having believed and obeyed from the heart a form of teaching, it is our own part to confess it with our lips. It is indeed not easy to be sure of our own perfect truthfulness in this, or in that of any one, so hard is it to keep apart what we really believe from what we have somehow come to say we believe. Still, since we cannot see the heart, we must not try to do more than take the confession made by men as the groundwork of a consent by which they may come together in an organized body for the better doing of Christian work. We gather from the New Testament that such bodies may be far from being like each other, and yet keep up true Christian fellowship; as was clearly the case with the church in Jerusalem, and the churches founded among the

Gentiles by St. Paul. Such bodies were clearly so made up as that the men who bound themselves together in each of them should be all of the same mind on the greater number of points. Thus may each help and strengthen his neighbour in the work each has to do for his Master, without stopping every hour to settle what ought to be done, and how it had best be done. It is then that they, who are of the number of those whose names are written in heaven, may, while they are on earth, do their Christian work quickly, smoothly, and quietly, that each set of them, or as we say, each visible church or sect, has its Confession of Faith, each man taking that confession as his own which he honestly thinks he believes to be true. If he changes his views on some point which he once confessed, deeming it to be the mind of Christ, he can go, or be asked to go, to another company with whose confession he is now more at one; and this without losing for a moment the love of his brethren, and without the thought in any man that he had thus passed out of Christian fellowship, or that to have changed his mind was in itself wrong. St. John then clearly thinks that the communion of saints has not much to do with more than a few of the articles of which a creed is made up.

But it has to do with some of them. St. John, with all his sweetness, shows the fire that is in him by the strong words he uses, and notably in his

Second Epistle, when speaking of the men calling themselves Christians, who deny that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh. They are "deceivers," he says; they are "antichrists"—they have not God. No Christian is to receive them into his house, or give them greeting. St. Paul, in like manner, utters an anathema against those, seemingly in the Church, "who love not the Lord Jesus Christ." And the Gospel writers with one voice cut off from all right to the name of Christian those "who, though they have the form of godliness, are strangers to its power." Of such are lovers of self, lovers of money, boastful, haughty, railers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, without natural affection, implacable, slanderers, without self-control, fierce, no lovers of good, traitors, headstrong, puffed up, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, not to speak of murderers, adulterers, fornicators, drunkards. Persons such as these "have no place in the kingdom of Christ and of God." Therefore it is that the members of a church, when they are gathered together, are to put away, as a duty lying on each of them, "such wicked persons from among them."[1] But in doing this, the great law of Christian charity is not to be forgotten. Whatever is done must be for the good, not for the hurt, of the sinner. We do not know what St. Paul means by "delivering to Satan"[2] a very bad man. But even

[1] 1 Cor. V. 13. [2] 1 Tim. I. 20.

this harsh punishment had, as its end, "that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus," and in another case "that he might learn not to blaspheme."

As for ourselves, we have not often to deal with offenders against any of the greatest truths or duties. These few who make utter shipwreck of the faith, or fall into scandalous sin, ought to be, and for the most part are, treated faithfully and with justice. It is seldom that any marked bitterness of feeling is shown towards them; most men look on them with pity and forbearance. It is not against such persons that the evil in our nature, with its wrath and bitterness and evil speaking, is roused, but against those who hold as strongly as we do the great truths which give highest honour to Christ, and uphold all the rights of the law of God. If we ask ourselves who they are, against strong dislike to whom we as Christians have chiefly to watch and pray, we shall find that it is they who really are at one with us on all the greater points of truth and duty, but who differ from us in some lesser things. It does not help them much with us that they lead a God-fearing life, and that they do not deny a single fact which we hold to be true. It is enough if they have theories about some of these facts which are not ours. They frighten us, as if the facts were nothing without the theories, and not the theories, whether theirs or ours, nothing without

the facts. We perhaps even feel that they go beyond us in the eagerness of their search after truth, or in the sacrifices they make in lifting up those that are cast down, or in bringing back to righteousness those who are out of the way. Yet of these, some are strongly disliked for their boldness, and others scorned for their weakness or fantastic childishness. The weak judge and condemn the strong, and the strong will not "bear the infirmities of the weak." We have indeed to grieve, not only over the frequent uncharitableness we find in ourselves, but also over the notable one-sidedness of our judgments. None of us wish to be thought bigoted or narrow, but the best of us seem to be broad only in one direction. On the one side all is right, or at any rate pardonable; on the other side all is wrong, and to be heavily blamed, and yet we cannot fairly say that on either side is not to be found an equal love to Christ and to truth. Are any of us indeed afraid that, if the groundwork of our faith be laid bare, the lower stones of it shall be found wanting? Or, on the other side, can we say that childishness and want of good taste are sins, or that any man may, without blame, scorn the mild soul that trembles for the ark of God when it is quite safe? From a strong-minded, common-sense point of view, Judas was right about the alabaster box of ointment, and there are still, as there have ever been, many spendings like it of thought, or time,

or work, or money, which from the same point of view are useless waste. But our Lord saw with strong pleasure the woman bring her gift, and we may be sure that we are not pleasing Him if we mock at any one who, in His honour, does with a loving heart all he can, even though it be but the lighting of a candle, or the stitching of an altar-cloth, or the finding out the number of the beast. The two mites which the widow cast into the treasury would not go far to add to the glory of the temple, yet in our Lord's sight her little gift was far greater than the large offerings of the rich. As it is with money, so is it with mind. Surely the time will come when Christians will cease to forget that "*whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is born of God*," and that "*whosoever loveth Him that begat, loveth him also that is begotten of Him*."

Chap. V. vv. 2, 3.

Hereby we know that we love the children of God, when we love God, and do His commandments. For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments: and His commandments are not grievous.

We have already seen with what care St. John, as a good shepherd, stops all the gaps in the fence of truth through which we could stray into error

about this self-forgetting love, of which he makes so much. He has just done this by showing that love to God cannot be real if we are not loving our brother also. Now he turns to the other side, that he may keep us from thinking that there can be any true love to a Christian brother if we are not also loving God. It will not seem strange to us that he should make either the test of the other, if we bethink ourselves that he has in view two sets of men—those, on the one hand, who are sure they are loving God; those, on the other, who are sure that they are loving their brethren. They may both be mistaken. So, that this may not be, he says to the one, If you are really loving God, you will love your brother also; and to the other, If you are loving your Christian brother, you will certainly love God too. He thus strengthens what he has already told us: that the one love cannot be without the other; that the truly loving heart cannot go out in one line only,—it goes out alike to God and to all the children of God, because it finds in both like reasons for the same feeling.

The Apostle does not mean that a man cannot love another, who is a child of God, unless he also loves God (though this would be quite true if the word love be taken in its very highest sense); but that he cannot love another because he is a child of God, that is, on account of his Christian character, unless he also loves God. For just as a true Chris-

tian may make himself so unpleasant as that it is not easy for any one to have towards him any other love than that of pity, so may another child of God be so full of sweetness and goodness and helpfulness that many may like him, and even be fond of him, who do not love God. Selfishness itself is pleased with those by whose kindness and open hand it is served. But such men are loved by those who are of the world, not because they are Christians, but in spite of their Christianity. It would be acknowledged with a grudge, if at all, that their life owed any of its beauty to their being the children of God. It may happen that a man, really selfish and ungodly, may wish for some reason to think himself a Christian, and may therefore dwell on this kind feeling to some child of God. St. John would tell him that this was no proof that he loved God. It is not, he would say, the Godlike in your friend which you love, but that in him which, though it be Godlike, happens to bring you gain of some kind.

It is in the same way that many bring themselves to think that they are loving God, when it is really something they hope to get from Him, and not Himself, that is loved. St. John would therefore have us look not at His gifts, but at His commands. They bring out in God all that our selfishness dislikes, therefore with them in view a selfish man is not likely to think untruly that he is loving God. He will not be able to hide from himself that he even

dislikes, or hates God, if he tries with any honesty to do these commandments. It is only when this is tried by any one that God ceases to be an unknown God, and that our real feelings towards Him are opened up to ourselves. Hence the force of St. John's words. "*We know that we love the children of God,*" not only "*when we love God,*" but also "*when we do His commandments.*"

He goes on to teach us still further, that to love the children of God it is not enough that we keep His law; we must love it as well as keep it. For there is a doing of God's commandments through fear, or love of gain, to which is joined love neither to Him nor to His. Love casts out fear, but as surely does fear cast out love, and we are not likely to love the children of Him whom we dread. From this, as from a root, no doubt, springs much of the strife and unkind feeling which disgrace the household of God. If His children were not afraid of Him, they would be more ready to love each other, and find it to be indeed true that in their "Love is the fulfilling of the law."

It is worth notice that this second verse, if literally translated, begins with the words, "*in this*" not "*by this*" we know. It is in the very act of loving God and keeping His commandments, or rather trying to keep them, that the feeling comes to us that we love all His children. We know from what we are going through ourselves, what their straits are,

their battles, their failures, their hopes and their fears. Whence comes a thorough fellow-feeling with them, which forgets or makes light of many differences. We feel how many more, than those who in all things are at one with us, belong to the great fellowship of the saints.

St. John now goes on to tell us why he has joined together love to God and the doing of His commandments. The two are never found apart. The one indeed is in a sense the same as the other. "This," he says, "*is* the love of God that we keep His commandments." This keeping is, as it were, embodied or visible love. If it be in us it keeps God ever before us, as a Being whose wish or will or law is never to be forgotten by us, but to be loved as part of Himself. If we are afraid of God, or think of Him only as One who has gifts for us, it is quite otherwise. In that case we must no doubt keep His laws, but we do not love to keep them. The slave or the servant, who works only for money, does as little as he can to escape the lash, or to gain his wage. But love is careful to forget nothing and to leave out nothing it can do.

It is needful to keep this in mind, for in thinking that we are loving God there seems to be boundless room for error. Among the many souls of men there are those in whom strong emotion is easily roused. They are men of feeling. All that is beautiful, or gracefully sad in another, closely

touches them, yet they have no righteousness, no sense of duty. Their goodness is like the morning cloud and the early dew, beautiful but useless. Nay, it is hurtful; for they themselves are vain of it: and therefore, because they are unwilling that it should be hid, they talk much of their feelings, and some of them, in set phrases, of their love to God and devotedness to Christ. Now we know that as in a deep river there are places where its quiet is broken by the swiftness of its running, so are there times when a soul full to overflowing with love to God, is so carried away as to break into outspoken praise of Him. Yet it is true that the deepest feelings are for the most part strong without noise for whatever work they may have to do. For all feeling is given to help us, when duty sets us so hard a task, that in cold blood it could not be done. The risk is that when a feeling, like love, is pleasant, it is welcomed simply as an enjoyment, and not with any thought of work to come of it. In that case it tends to no good. The soul is weakened by it, and more and more set against all that tires or pains it. Better far to want strong emotion altogether, than thus to misuse it, for the most true and noble love can be without it.

It is well to keep this in mind, for there are many who think bitterly or almost hopelessly of themselves, as men who do not love God, and that only because they have not in their hearts an unceasing

outwelling of strong emotion towards Him. Now most men certainly have no such emotion ever springing up within them towards those about them on earth, their love to whom is beyond all doubt. It arises in its strength when those whom we love are in straits. If our friend be sick, or in grief, or in danger, then, because we must bestir ourselves to work or fight for him, strong feeling comes to our aid, and the heavier the work—the more unequal the fight, the stronger is the feeling, rousing us, urging us, to do all we can to help or save our friend.

We can often see how we ought to think of ourselves in those things wherein we have to do with God, by putting for a moment in His place those who are nearest to us on earth. We measure the love of a child or of a friend, not by what he says of the strength of his feeling, or by any cheap show that he makes of it, but by what he really does to please or help us. Christ would teach us in the parable of the "Two Sons" that it is so with God. He hath showed us what is good, and what He requires of us is to "do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with Him." Not words from a glib tongue, but deeds from a faithful heart. His commandments tell us what He wishes us to do for Him. It is them therefore we must keep, not putting in place of them fancies of our own, as if we knew better than He what He would wish.

And they are to be moreover "*His*" commandments, those which He alone gives us, and not those only which are laid on us equally by God and by those about us, by whom our habits have been trained. To be fairly honest is with us no proof by itself of the new birth; but there are men in the world, who, if they cease to steal, or begin to speak the truth, thereby make it very clear that they love God. For there are some who enter on the Christian life so far from the height of holiness, that in climbing towards it they scarcely reach in this life the point whence others, more happy in their birth and early surroundings, began to rise. The child, who owes his being to a long line of Christian forefathers, can never know up through what a foul jungle of sin a heathen convert has to force his way, before he reaches the common decencies which were the other's birthright. It is in many ways good for us to remember that there are places where to cease to be a cannibal is a marked sign of grace.

There are even times and places in which we cannot but see love to God in acts which, were they ours, would be wrong. We find fault with monks and nuns and hermits, as people who, obeying no law of God, greatly mistake the true ends of the Christian life. Yet how cruel would it be for us to doubt that love to God was in the heart of many of them, who, through an honest error made sacrifice to Him of all they held most dear. What have we

given up for Christ that we can venture to sit in judgment on them? The Jesuits are grievously wrong in many things, yet the story of the self-sacrifice made by many of their missionaries puts us to shame. To say, as has been said, that such deeds are the fruit of a false religion, which teaches that heaven may thus be purchased, is to sin against the Gospel. For it is to hold that self-love is as strong as the love of God, and that it leads to sacrifices great as any which that love ever made. It becomes no Christian man to doubt that a Godlike love is proved by such deeds as these.

There are some who blame themselves for want of love to God, because they do not like some of the duties they owe to Him. But clearly it is one thing to like to do work for God, and quite another thing to like the work itself that has been set us by God. We make no sacrifice, we show no love, if at any rate we would have done the very thing which it happens God tells us to do. We show no kindness to our friend by walking home with him, if for our own ends we need to go to the street in which he lives. Love is shown by doing what, but for love, we would not have done. Sacrifice is no sacrifice if we wish to get rid of that which we offer. No man can like to be hurt. If sorrow does not give us pain it is no sorrow. Love can have no triumph if it has fought no battle. It shows its greatest power when it leads us gladly to do things that we most dislike,

—to take pleasure, as St. Paul did, in things wherein there can be no pleasure,—"in weakness, in injuries, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake."[1] Thus we may dislike, for its own sake, the work God gives us to do, and yet, if we do it, find comfort in the fact that we dislike it, because that very dislike has given our love the longed-for chance of putting forth its strength, and showing its reality. It has pleased itself, as true love does, by suffering for its object.

It is in this sense, above all others, that it may be said that to His child the commandments of God "*are not grievous*." We must also, however, remember, to the praise of God, that there is not one of these, obedience to which is not good for ourselves. We would lay every one of them on ourselves, if we saw and knew all that God sees and knows. It is not grievous to tell a child that he must not eat a poisonous fruit on which his heart is set. There is grief in his obedience, but the grief would be far greater if he disobeyed.

We have taken the text as if St. John taught in it that if we love God we will keep His commandments. But his words are, as we began by showing, that "*This 'is' the love of God that we keep His commandments*." Now we have seen that in this Epistle "*the love of God*" means love like the love in God which He has shown to us. So that we may

[1] 2 Cor. XII. 10.

take St. John as telling us here that all love that is Godlike shows itself in doing His will, or in copying His love as His will sets it forth. We can see this to be true if we remember that each one of His commandments is one of the small pieces, as it were, into which, for the easier use of His children, the great law of love is broken up. The whole law is summed up in the love which fulfils it and gave it.

We indeed are far from fulfilling that law. We know therefore that our love to God is poor and stunted. This grieves us, for we wish to think well of our love to God. What then are we to do that it may thrive and grow? We shall certainly do it no good by going down to our hearts, that we may beg them, or force them to love. We can no more do this than we can, by an act of our will, make a tree to grow. But if we cannot force its growth, we can help it by setting it where the sun can best shine on it and the rain water it. So is it with our love to God. Such as it is, we can bring it out into the light of the glory of God as it shines from the face of Christ. We can place it, by prayer, where the grace of the Holy Ghost may like dew distil upon it, and we can remember that its roots, small for the most part and hidden, creep most healthily among the little duties which God has set around us; the duties not so much of a lifetime, or of a year, as of the next hour or minute. For if we separate our love of God from these it will soon wither, just as

a tree would that had no better run for its roots than a pile of great stones.

Chap. V. vv. 4, 5.

For whatsoever is begotten of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that hath overcome the world, even our faith. And who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God?

The great reason why the commands of God are not grievous to His children is, that if they are kept in a loving spirit the burden of them becomes light. But in all obedience to them is more or less of conflict, in which, however, the child of God gains the day. His enemy is the world, which ever sets itself against the very principle of the Christian life. The mark of the world is selfishness, that of the Christian is love. St. John has noted this very clearly in the two foes, and he therefore takes for granted that warfare between them must never cease. Selfishness, or the world as St. John saw it, when embodied in a government like that of Rome, cannot but set itself against real Christianity. It will try to make the children of God unfaithful to the truth, or to some part of it; and history is full of the conflicts which have thus arisen. The victories of faith have been many and great. The weapon which has most helped to gain them has been

patience. The church, however, has certainly done more in keeping her own, than in seizing her enemies' ground. It seems hopeless to drive the selfish spirit out of any government, and to put in its place the principle of brotherly love or righteousness. Christians have here largely failed in their duty. Their aim has for the most part been to bring governments not so much to adopt Christian principles as to support the Christian Church, and to do this by directly or indirectly persecuting those of the brethren who, few in number and not high in place, have had thoughts of their own. It is this too frequent alliance between the world and the church which has done much to keep back the passing away of the world's selfishness from before the face of Christ.

We are all well acquainted with the world as embodied in the groups, each of which forms the society in which men of one or another rank or business move. Strangely unlike as these are in their ways, and often far from friendly to each other, selfishness or the world has a stronghold in every one of them; and it is with the world as it shows itself in the society of which he is a part that the Christian has many and perilous conflicts. What those about him do, he also must do; their habits must be his habits, their ways his ways, else will he be treated as a stranger and foreigner, and be met, if not with rude force, with ridicule and unworthy

blame. If he is to be true to Christ, he may have to give up friendships, and even break the ties of kindred. Though his heart be full of love, he must sometimes act as if he hated those most dear to him. Our Lord knew this, and warned His disciples of the painful struggles thus before them.

From these the child of God does not always escape when he takes refuge in societies which call themselves by the name of Christ. For even in them the world, in the form of envy, jealousy, covetousness, unfairness, bitterness, too often has its seat. The church, not blind to the duty of conflict with the world of society, has been wont to attack some of the outposts rather than the stronghold of its power; to blame some of the things it does, rather than the principle on which it does them, and so to allow selfishness in some of its worst forms to have a strong sway within her own bounds. She has not yet taught the lesson, or at least, except in some quiet corners, she has not tried herself to live up to it, that charity is greater than either faith or hope, and that what faith has chiefly to do is to fight for the life of love against the world.

But if faith had to heed only these outward enemies, her victory would be easy. It is the world within us, the selfishness which has its stronghold in the heart of each one of us, that it is so hard to overcome. We have not to say of the world, any more than of the kingdom of God—"Lo, here it is,

or lo there," for it is within us, and has there its hidden place of meeting with the prince of the world, and helps him to more than half the battle in the warfare with faith. Once overcome within us, the world outside of us could not enslave us.

St. John has already said much of this evil nature, this sinful heart, this selfishness that dwelleth in us, the enemy of the race and of each of us, deceiving us, degrading us, ruining us. It is this selfishness which has filled God's world with wretchedness, and is the cause of all the real evils in the life of man. We have all seen this, and know it to be true, yet we do not believe it. We go on to blame for our failures, not our want of love to God and to our neighbour, but our want of wisdom. And indeed we are right in blaming our want of wisdom; for in the sight of God and of all who, like Him, are in the light, selfishness is not more sin than it is very great folly.

But no child of God is in utter darkness, and, so far as he is in the light, he sees, and fights, and overcomes the world. This is what St. John means when he says, not "*whosoever,*" but "*whatsoever*" is begotten of God overcometh the world. Whatever, then, is in us of the Divine nature, though it be little and weak, fights with the love of self, and so far gets the better of it. We are children, and are far from having reached our full strength; but up to the height of our spiritual growth towards the

stature of the perfect man in Christ is the living force of our struggle with the world and our strength to overcome it. Nothing seems to St. John a more evil sign of one who calls himself a Christian, than carelessness about his neighbour's wellbeing; or that selfish dealing with God which takes all it can from Him, but has no wish to do anything for Him; or, what is worse, which would sacrifice to Him stale pleasures for which it does not care, or which it can no longer afford; or lays on His altar, as if it were a sacrifice to Him, that which is really offered to vanity or ambition.

In so far as the child of God overcomes the world, he does so, St. John tells us, by his faith. The plainest idea we can form of faith is, that it brings before us, as real, things of which we can have no knowledge at first hand; things which do not touch the senses; things far off in time or place; things which are not as yet, or not seen as yet; things which must be now, or hereafter, or must have been in the past, because other things are, or have been. Faith rests on testimony, on promises, on character, or on the instinct that like causes have like effects. Much more might be said of faith, but needlessly so far as our understanding of what St. John here says has to do with it. Its virtue lies in this; that it delivers us from the tyranny of things present and near, and enables us to set beside them, as of equal rank, the distant or the future, so as to choose that one

which seems to us best. This is the idea of faith, which we find largely illustrated in the Epistle to the Hebrews. Things far off in time or place are seen and weighed against things present, and choice is made between them. That must be aimed at which is seen by faith to reward those who spend themselves in seeking it. Some better thing far off is waiting for us, for which the ease or pleasure beside us must be given up. Respect is to be had to the clearly seen "recompense of the reward." The race, with all its toil, is to be run for the far-off prize which faith holds up.

This being faith, it is clear that most of the things done in the world are done in faith. Those done without it are few, and among the least noble of our works, though these are by no means always wrong. On the other hand, there are no bounds to the greatness of the deeds to which faith prompts. It is faith, in its every-day working, which saves man from a thousand evils, which lifts him above the brutes, which rouses him to put forth his powers both of body and mind, which holds passion in check, and bridles appetite, and which, to say no more of it, opens to man the unseen world so that he can worship God. We cannot, indeed, think too highly of faith as working for the good of man, even if we take it as that which enables us to put joy just now over against sorrow afterwards, or self-denial now against a rich reward at last. Even

taking it thus, the world of selfishness, in some of its worst forms, is overcome by faith. But not in its principles. We need faith for all wise living; it urges to many noble deeds, it helps us to very much that is best for ourselves; without it we cannot know God or please Him; but it does not, when alone, lift us into the higher region of self-forgetfulness which St. John is ever setting before us as the proper dwelling-place of our souls. We must have faith if we are to overcome the world, but faith cannot do this apart from a special thing seen by faith. It is not without a most powerful comrade that faith is able to gain any real victory.

When Another, because of what He is, or can do, is the object of faith, it begins to rise to its higher work. It then becomes what we call "trust." When we are sure of the greater knowledge, or wisdom, or power, of Another, and see that something in our future is more safe in His hands than in our own, then, though we do not escape from our love of self, we yet rise above misleading vanity and the pride that will not owe anything to another. We thus lay in our humility the foundation of a gratitude which may rise, and often does rise, to that self-forgetful love to another, which is the greatest height to which faith can carry us. For then it becomes the noble faith that is pictured by St. Paul, the faith that worketh by love,[1] which leads us in the unseen world to the feet of Christ,

[1] Gal. V. 6.

and gives us for ever after, in Him, the object of a devotion in which self is quite forgotten. Our faith in thus bringing us to Christ does in the very act overcome the world.

St. John no doubt thought of this when he wrote that our faith was the victory that overcomes the world. Faith by itself does overcome, he saw, some of its worst evils. By faith the world is driven from much of the outward life, but not out of the heart. In it love of self still holds its place. It would be well for us ever to remember this. We should always try so clearly to see the future as to be able to weigh it against the present; to be able, like Moses, to deny ourselves the pleasures of sin by looking to the recompense of the reward, and to endure in obedience to God rather than awaken the wrath of Him who is invisible. A man who knows himself will part with no thought or feeling which may be a safeguard to him against sin. There were times when even St. Paul braced himself against the sins of the flesh, by filling his mind with the fear of being himself a castaway. But he certainly did not think that his faith gave him no motives to holiness higher than that.

Perhaps we do not see so clearly as we ought that there may be a trust—a faith of a kind—in Christ Himself which is quite selfish and worldly. It is good for a man that he should have been brought to the point whence he can get a clear view of judg-

ment and of the just wrath of God against sin. If that has never been seen by him, he has not seen what Christ and His apostles certainly saw. If he has never seen that it would have been better for him never to have been born than to live and work iniquity, then is he blind to an awful fact vouched for by Christ. It is good therefore for him that faith should let him see these terrors. Such a revelation has been to many their first glimpse of truth, and the first beginning of eternal life in them. A man's own safety from such a future is lawfully his first thought. But if he goes on with his mind fixed on that alone, and sees in Christ nothing more than a means of escape from the "unquenchable fire," caring no more for Him than the man cared for the wretches of whom he made stepping stones out of a burning church—if that view of Christ be what he calls faith in Him—then certainly it is not such faith that will ever give him victory over the world. Christ may be scourged and die for all that such a faith cares, if only he who has it is safe. One sometimes meets a faith like this, though it is not seen by him who has it to be like this. St. James had been much grieved by it, and it is of it he asks, if it can save a man. As known among ourselves it is often marked by boastfulness and want of charity. With it comes no righteousness, or any such works as could have had their rise only in love to God or to man.

It is on this account that St. John, wishing much that no man should be misled into the idea that any kind of faith can get the better of the world, goes on to tell us what must be the one object of faith if it is to overcome. "*Who*," saith he, "*is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God?*"

To understand why St. John thinks this truth to be of so great value to the Christian life, we may go back to what he has already taught in Chaps. II. 22, 23 and IV. 15. He has made it clear that there can be no real faith in the Divine Sonship of Jesus unless there be a true sympathy with Him and an adoring sense of His perfect unselfishness. It is in the grace and truth which filled His life of service to man, and reached their height in His death, that the glory must be seen, which can belong to none other than the Only Begotten of the Father. Therefore it is that the world, though it can easily make in words a confession of this truth, cannot know it, and that no selfish man can really hold it with heart and mind. Those who, in the true sense of the word, believe it are the unselfish who are overcoming the world.

St. John has therefore a strong reason for stating this truth here. He is wishing to use it as one weapon against the Antichrists, who denied that Jesus is the Son of God. He asks his children to think of what they themselves have seen and known.

Who among you, as if he said, is getting the better of the world? Who are those whom you see rising above love of self? Are they not the men who believe that Jesus is the Son of God? Do these new teachers and their followers stand out in the front battle with the world as unselfish and Christlike men? Is it not the case that the self-forgetful among you—the men whose faith in Christ works by love, and who have been raised by it above all thought of themselves; the men in whom there is least of bitterness or envy or evil speaking; the men who are more full of love to the brethren, the most thoughtful for those who are in trouble, the most pitiful to those who sin, the most ready to help the weak and to bear their infirmities; the men who walk among you in some measure as Christ also walked, the unselfish, the self-sacrificing—are they not the men who, against the Antichrists, uphold that Jesus is the Son of God? Who among you is it that overcomes the world? Is it not he who believes this?

It is our Lord's own argument which St. John here uses. The real character of men, and of men and of their teaching, is to be known by their fruits.[1] If it is fair thus to weigh the worth of men's lives, it is equally fair to put their views to the same test. The highest good at which we can aim is to become like Christ in overcoming the world. To what extent

[1] Matt. VII. 16.

then, we may well ask, does a given doctrine help towards this? It is not the highest aim of God, in His teaching us, to satisfy our curiosity or to raise in us high-soaring thoughts. It is not even to give us present peace and joy or to save us from conflicts with doubt. Such gifts are in His purpose, but it reaches far beyond them, and in its further aim seems often for the present utterly to pass them by. At any cost to Himself or to us, He must free us from our sins, and make us like Christ, and bring us into full sympathy and fellowship with Himself. It is then the strength in a doctrine to raise us higher in the Christian life which gives it value. No two minds indeed may be quite at one as to the place to be given to a doctrine when judged by this test. For Christian men are not altogether like each other in their weakness or in their strength. A truth which greatly helps one man may be of small use to another. No man therefore can be sure that his neighbour will be helped as he has been by certain truths or forms of truth. Each man must, as in the sight of God, rate truths for himself. This, however, is certain, that if we honestly feel that a doctrine, or form of teaching, does not tend to make us better men, to save us from sin, to give us victory over the world, we may set it aside as valueless to us, and probably as of small value to any one. Endless time has been wasted, and temper lost, by good men, over views and notions which never were

and never could be of practical use to any man in this or in any other world. But if we find that a doctrine rouses us, spurs us on, strengthens us, cheers us in following after a Christlike righteousness, let us greatly prize it, and reckon that the good it thus does to us is one proof at least of its truth.

It has been said by those who deny the Divinity of Christ that it is a mere dogma, fought for by some whose theory of an atonement could not hang together without it; but that it is not of any real worth as moving to higher issues the heart or the life of man. It cannot be denied that this has sometimes been seen to be a too well-merited reproach. Those who have led the battle on behalf of this doctrine have not, since the age of the apostles, always been men of the highest Christian worth; while, on the other hand, some of those who deny it have been men of unselfish lives. But in dealing with such a test of truth as this, it is not safe to rest our judgment on single cases. It by no means follows that, because a man upholds a doctrine, he really believes it; or, that because a man denies a doctrine, the truth of it may not be seated in his heart. The beliefs we think we have, and our real beliefs, are not always the same. But as a broad truth resting on what we know of bodies of men, rather than in one or two men standing alone, St. John seems certainly in the right now, as he was

then, when he holds that the zealous, self-denying lives, marked by the clearset victories over the world, are those of Christians who have strongly held that Jesus is the Son of God. The religious life of those who deny this is, for the most part, so wanting in warmth and spiritual strength as scarcely to be life at all.

The way in which faith in the Divinity of Christ rouses and strengthens the soul to fight with the world has already been brought before us more than once. We have seen how changed would be our thoughts of God, if the Christ whom He sent into the world had been merely one of our fellow-creatures, His servant and not His Son. The sufferings laid on Him would have driven us away from God, instead of showing to us His love, and thus drawing us to Him as to a Father for whose sake we are ready to endure hardness in fighting with the world. Besides, in Christ as God, having now these attributes of which while on earth He emptied Himself, we have One of whom we can think as always and everywhere beside us, yet not as a vague Spirit, filling boundless time and space, but as also our true brother man, whom we can understand, and of whom we can think as being touched with the feeling of our infirmities, as having been tempted as we are, and therefore as the living and outstanding object of a faith which puts in Him undoubting trust, and works for Him with un-

bounded love. This is St. John's lofty idea of what faith does for the Christian. His heart, which, rather than be left empty, would have kept fast and even desperate hold of the world, false to its promises as it would have been found, is filled by One who meets its longings now, and will give it an everlasting fulness of rest—One for whose sake he is ready to fight to the death against the world, the flesh, and the devil.

Chap. V. v. 6.

This is He that came by water and blood, even Jesus Christ; not with (or *in*) *the water only, but with* (or *in*) *the water and with* (or *in*) *the blood.*

He, who is seen by that loving faith which overcomes the world, is here spoken of by St. John in strange words. We may be sure that they to whom he was writing would understand why he thus spoke of Jesus Christ. That we also may do so, we must try to put ourselves in their place. The question which, above all others, was then filling their thoughts was about the Divinity of our Lord as denied by the Antichrists. St. John had just given an argument for it. Now he would give a strong and memorable form of words in which to state the truth about it. Such a form must meet face to face that in which we may believe the Antichrists to have

put their error. They said that Jesus was not God, —that it was to dethrone God thus to exalt Jesus. God had indeed been with Him as with no other man. He was a prophet and more than a prophet. God did not only speak to Him, He had in some sense dwelt in Him. We do not know what the very forms were in which the heresies of these earliest days were cast. We gather all that we can say of them from the arguments used by St. Paul and St. John to meet them, and from all we know of what those, who came after these Antichrists, held and taught. From these sources we may gather that the Antichrists had already given the name of the heavenly Christ to a Divine Being, whom they fancied to have come forth from God and to have entered into Jesus, abiding in Him for a time. This Being, they said, came to Jesus when the water of baptism was poured on Him by His forerunner John, but left Him with the first drop of His blood when He was nailed to the Cross, making use meanwhile of the body and soul of Jesus to manifest through them, by example and precept, the character and will of God.

Such a view as this was not without seeming truth, not only because it kept clear of the unbearable idea, as they thought it, of the Divine Being becoming an infant, who could grow in wisdom and favour with God, and in the end die a shameful death, but also because there were facts in the his-

tory of Jesus which could not otherwise have had any place in it. The baptism of Jesus clearly marked a great crisis in His life. A heavenly Being *did* then descend on Him, and it was after that descent that He was, by a voice from heaven, for the first time called the Son of God. Was not this, the Antichrists said, the entrance into Jesus of the heavenly Christ? Was it not then that Jesus became Jesus Christ? It is equally clear that soon before His death an event happened, mysterious and awful, known to us by the cry uttered on the Cross—"My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?" Does not this show that the heavenly Christ had left Jesus just before that time?

Falsehoods, which do not die as soon as they are uttered, have always in them some grains of truth which keep them in life; and we can see how these two facts in the life of Jesus would be as a living soul to the errors of the Antichrists, giving them favour in the eyes of the world, and troubling the minds of the children of God. We can fancy also how these false teachers, knowing how telling it is to have a short party cry, would set forth their views by saying that the Christ came with water and went with blood. Thus we can understand why St. John met their error with the strange form of words we find here—"*This is He who came by water and blood*"; and how, fearing when he had written this, he, lest he should seem to be thus allowing that

the Christ came to Jesus by means of the water of John's baptism, so far changes his phrase by putting "*with*" in place of "*by*"—"*not with the water only, but with the water and the blood*"—as if he said the Divine Being, the Christ, was then from the first to the last with Jesus; not *after* only, but *when* He was baptized, and with Him also when He died on the Cross. St. John states the second of these facts, that He was "*with the blood,*" with the greater force, not only that he might fix it in the minds of his children, but because the Antichrists no doubt made it their strongest point that the Son of God could not die.

But in the words before us, St. John did not wish to give anything more than a short statement of the truth about Jesus Christ, to be used as a telling reply to the watchword of the Antichrists. He was thinking, when he wrote them, not only of the person, but also of the work of Christ. The error he was meeting must have taken from that work a great part of its glory. The Antichrists probably upheld that the heavenly Christ did many and great things while He dwelt in Jesus. Through Him God was manifested in many ways, and the teaching and example of Jesus was made powerful to the cleansing of the life of man. He came by water, the symbol of cleansing, and, they would no doubt add, by the water of John's baptism, which, as it was "unto repentance," was therefore rightly poured

on Jesus for His cleansing from sin before the heavenly Christ descended upon Him. But He came by water only. The work of Jesus, they said, in so far as he was the Christ, was done before He died.

It is against this false and one-sided view that St. John raises his voice. Jesus Christ came, not only to cleanse the souls of men from the filthiness of sin, but to bear their sins, and to give Himself for them, that their sins might be forgiven. He therefore came, not in the water only, but "*in the water and the blood*," the blood being a symbol of that sacrifice which He made of Himself when He gave His life a ransom for many.

It is true that St. John dwells much more on the spiritual life of the Christian, as led by him, than in the legal title to life which becomes his through the death of Christ. But we should greatly err if we thought that he did not put its proper value on the right to life which we gain through Christ. He teaches in this Epistle that Christ "is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only, but also for the whole world"; and in his Gospel he would have us keep this in view, along with all that is true of the new birth and of the power of Christ to cleanse and ennoble the soul. In his account of the crucifixion we can mark his earnestness in urging this. In a passage surely pointed at by the words before us, he tells us, as a fact seen by him-

self, that, when a soldier with a spear pierced the side of the dead Christ, forthwith there came out blood and water. That we may understand why St. John has made so much of this fact, it has been said that his wish was to make it clear to us that Christ really died. Others, gathering medical witness, have seen in it a proof that our Lord died of a broken heart. One is tempted to give some place to what may well have been a result of the mysterious forsaking, and thus to see that the cause of His death was within Himself, that no man took His life from Him, but that He "laid it down of Himself." But the words before us in this Epistle seem to make it more likely that the fact was so carefully stated, not without thought of the very Antichrists and their error, against which he is here setting himself. In the blood and water, which he remembered to have so clearly seen streaming from the side of his Lord, he was aware of a miracle, wrought for the very end that it might be used in disproof of their errors. It was a sign to him that Christ came, not "*with water only, but with the water and the blood.*"

Perhaps all that we are ready to say about this is that it may be so. It is well to be somewhat afraid of drawing from symbols, not hints and lights, but formal truths. The history of the church has taught us how strange is the work which fancy may make of symbols. Too keen a search for truth through

the mazes of type and symbol has often proved misleading and dangerous. But we may be sure that while we follow St. John we are on safe ground. And, indeed, we may well agree with him here if we keep clearly in mind how closely the error of the Antichrists is linked with the wish, which many feel, to leave out of view the sacrifice for sin which Christ offered for us in His death, and to think of Him only as bringing about, by His teaching and life, freedom from the power of sin to those who believe on Him—to hold that He came only with the water, the symbol of cleansing, but not with the blood, the symbol of propitiatory sacrifice. It is needful now, as when St. John wrote, to urge that He came, not with the water only, but with the water and with the blood. It is still a great truth that the blood and the water which flowed from the pierced side of Christ set forth what Wesley calls "the double cure" of sin—the cleansing of the believing soul, not only from its power, but also from its guilt.

Chap. V. vv. 7, 8

And it is the Spirit that beareth witness, because the Spirit is the truth. For there are three who bear witness, the Spirit, and the water, and the blood: and the three agree in one.

There can be no doubt that these words as they stand here, copied from the Revised Version, are all that St. John wrote, and that the other words which we find in our older Bibles were added hundreds of years after he was dead. It is painful to have to cut out of Scripture a passage or even a word which good men have so long found in it; nor should this be done without the greatest caution and the strongest reasons. There are some places where an error seems not unlikely in the version we have, and a few in which we perhaps wish that error could be proved, for this would clear the way through some entangled texts. But on no ground of likelihood, even the strongest, may the text be changed. It must remain, as a careful study of the manuscripts shows it to have stood, at the earliest point to which honest research can go back. But, on the other hand, a word or passage must with equal faithfulness be cut out, however much we might wish to keep it, if it can be proved, by a like honest and thorough search, that it had no place in the early copies. It is so with the words which,

in our older Bibles, speak of the three heavenly witnesses. All who have been able narrowly to look into the truth about them are at one as to the fact that these words are found in no Greek manuscript before the sixteenth century. They are quoted by no Greek father, and they were clearly unknown to all the Eastern churches. It was not until the end of the fifth century that we find them creeping into the Latin text. These are the just grounds on which they are to be left out. But it may be added that they do not fit into the place where they have been put. St. John is speaking of the reasons which we on earth have for believing that Jesus is the Son of God. To this truth he says there are three witnesses—the Spirit, the water, and the blood; but in the added words, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost are said to bear witness in heaven, and not to us on earth; and further, the phrases, the "three are one" and the "three agree in one," give us only an unmeaning play on words, unworthy of St. John.

Those who wish to look more deeply into this can search the critical commentaries on the Greek text of this Epistle, and will come to know that, beyond all doubt, the words setting forth the heavenly witnesses were added to help those who were upholding, against a host of foes, the true Divinity of Christ. The temptation probably was great, but that any yielded to it is only one proof

among many that to uphold the words in which a truth is put does not always show much love to truth itself. There was indeed no need to forge such a weapon. The form of it no doubt is so good, and comes to the hand so readily, that one might have thought that it, and many like it, would be found in the armoury of God's Word. But it is not the way of Scripture, least of all of St. John, to put such a truth as the Divinity of Christ in so hard and sharp-edged a form. As we have more than once already seen, St. John's wish is that all Christians, along with himself and St. Peter, should rise through acquaintance with Christ to an advancing sense of His Divine greatness, rather than that, for any reason, they should give their assent to a form of words which they do not understand, and the force of which they cannot feel.

That which St. John wishes to teach us is, that every Christian has ground enough for believing as a fact that Jesus is the Son of God. We are able to overcome the world when that fact is believed by us, and along with it, that He came "not with the water only, but with the water and the blood,"—not for the single end of cleansing the soul, but also by His death to atone for its sins. It is because the Christian finds himself, when he has this faith, able to overcome the world, that he has, while on earth, ample proof given him of the great truths about Christ. The witness comes straight to him-

self, and indeed from himself. He does not need to have it proved to him by others that Jesus has come into the world, full of a grace and truth which make it clear that He has a glory as of the Only Begotten of the Father, and that He holds at the same time a power clearly Divine, by which He cleanses the soul from sin itself, having first lifted off from it, by the sacrifice of Himself, the load of its guilt. The Christian is aware of a great change in himself. The Cross of Christ is no longer to him a stumbling-block or foolishness. He feels it to be the very "power of God and the wisdom of God." The power in it has strongly wrought in himself. It has made him hate his own selfishness, and, not without some victories, to fight against it.

The value of this witness borne to each believer, so that he has within himself good grounds for believing the truth about Jesus Christ, is clear, if we keep in mind that the other proofs on which faith in Jesus Christ may rest are, as a ground-work even for its first beginnings, out of the reach of all, save of the very few who have had so much leisure and training as to be able to gather and weigh the external evidences for it. Much study and thought are needed before one can judge for himself whether the books are trustworthy in which we are told of the life and death and resurrection of Christ. Were these books written by the men who saw for themselves what they tell? Were these men really able

to form any safe judgment on events so strange? Were they truthful men, and therefore good witnesses? Have we their books as they wrote them? and if there were other books of the same kind, who were they, and where did they live, who chose from among them those which we are asked to trust? These questions and many like them would have to be settled before, on the ground of external evidence, any one could begin to rest his faith on Christ. A few of us have had time to look into these questions, and so far at least to answer them, thus perhaps helping ourselves and others to meet some forms of doubt; but seldom if ever has the study of them wrought by itself in any man a living faith in Christ. It is on the conscience and the heart that the Gospel first lays hold. It is not by history, but by the Spirit, the water, and the blood, that St. John sees witness borne to Christ on earth. His own witness he has indeed given, but he forgets it when these greater witnesses stand forth. Before them he draws back. The man who is urged to come to Christ that he may be saved is clearly not asked, by God or by man, to be greatly moved by the external evidences. Not by God, else would He have given to these evidences greater plainness and strength. And not by man—not at least by those men to whose teaching by far the greater number of Christians owe their knowledge of Christ. The story of His life and death and a very plain

statement of the ends for which He lived and died have been enough to lead countless men, laden with a sense of the guilt and power of their sins, to betake themselves to Christ, and to rest on Him for pardon and cleansing. To this they are often, but not always, helped by the report of those who before them have found in Christ a healing power. Yet not on this alone, or on this chiefly, did a living faith ever rest, but rather on the way in which the need of man is answered by the fulness which is in Christ. The Spirit of God, convincing them of their sin and misery, and enlightening their minds in the knowledge of what Christ is, and of what He has done, enables them to see how all their need is fully met by Him, so that they see Him to be real, and cling to Him as all their salvation.

It is thus that the Spirit bears witness to Christ, not by giving to any soul the knowledge of new facts, but by showing it the force, and meaning, and reality of the things of Christ already known to it by the hearing of the ear. It is thus, as Christ foretold, that the Holy Spirit has glorified Him. It is thus that He has borne witness to Him, taking of the things which are His and showing them to us, so that if we do see them, in this new and very notable way, we feel the power of Christ in this dealing of His Spirit with our spirits. What we notice in ourselves could not be unless there really was such an one as Christ is said to be. Facts

which we mark in ourselves ever point straight to His being and power as their source.

It may be said, it is indeed often said, that such faith as this is senseless and fanciful. That the character and work, as it is called, of a person set forth in a book, should fit into the felt need and longings of a soul, is no proof that such an one lives or ever lived. This only shows that the writer of that book had a good knowledge of what men are. Now, if the men, who, having had before them the character and work of Jesus, came to feel that He was real, were few in number, or of one class or race, such an objection would be not without force. But it is weak against the very striking fact that they, who, on the ground of what St. John calls the witness of the Spirit, have rested on Christ for all good, are of every people and tongue, bond and free, savage and refined. Men who are like in nothing else have in all ages given themselves to Him with a heart-felt, self-sacrificing faith. Lydia, the woman of Thyatira, the seller of purple in Philippi, whose heart the Lord opened to attend to the things she heard Paul speak by the river side, is but one of a countless multitude, of the rise of whose faith in Christ no other account could be given than that they heard the word and forthwith believed it. Such consent as this lifts the faith which men have in Christ out of the region of fancy. It cannot be that the call was never uttered which

so many of all ages and lands have heard and answered, that a hand had no being whose touch each one of so many has felt. There has, indeed, been in this world many a thriving falsehood; but never by any, save by Christ, has a faith been claimed which sets itself from the first against our strongest tendencies, and rests not till it, having conquered them, has set them all to new work.

Christ told His disciples that soon after He left them, a power working on His behalf would manifest itself in the world. It is the fulfilment of this promise which St. John sees in what he calls the witness of the Spirit, resting on which the Christian believes, and cannot but believe, that Jesus is the Son of God. But when he has once believed, his faith in the Divine power of Christ is ever freshly strengthened by clear proofs of it. Two other witnesses begin to add their testimony to that of the Holy Spirit, that thus the great truths about Christ may be more firmly settled. These witnesses St. John calls here the "*water and the blood.*"

When a man, resting on the witness of the Holy Spirit, believes in Christ, he undergoes a twofold change. The process of cleansing is begun in him, and the burden of guilt which pressed on him is lifted from him. He becomes a new man in feeling and in life. Old things are passing away from him. He has new aims and new longings; he is able to stand against temptations which before were too

strong for him, and to strip from himself many evil things which once clung to him as parts of himself. His soul is being cleansed and its thirst assuaged ever since he betook himself to Christ. This is what St. John calls the witness of the water. Along with it is given the witness of the blood. The Antichrists held that there was not, and could not be, any such witness; and there are many still who, with them, would set it aside. They allow that Christ's teaching and example tend to the cleansing of the soul. The water, therefore, may bear witness, but not the blood. Now, while Christians are not all at one as to what they feel to be the greater or the lesser value of the two testimonies, no man can deny the facts which bear out the Apostle when he ranges them beside each other. Countless men, burdened with a sense of guilt, pressed down into the very dust of death by dread of God's wrath, have found no escape from despair, save in the sacrifice which Christ made of Himself; but in that they have found rest and peace. From all parts of the earth, as well as in heaven where St. John heard it, the great hymn rises to Christ, "Worthy art Thou, for Thou wast slain and hast redeemed us to God by Thy blood." It is this unspeakable relief, brought to so many burdened souls by faith in Christ, which St. John calls the witness of the blood.

It must not be forgotten that both of these wit-

nesses must be heard together. For if there are those who set aside the witness of the blood, there are, on the other hand, many who make too light of the testimony of the water—who, if they get peace of mind by looking to the sacrifice of Christ, and thus know that He has power to save them from the guilt of their sins, are not careful to set their hearts on that holiness of life which, if they reached, would make Him clear to them as mighty to save them from the power of their sins. Such men fail to see that to reach peace is not so needful as to reach purity, and they lose, not only the testimony of a second witness, but that proof of the power of Christ which does indeed carry with it the greater weight. We cannot open the Book of Life to see if we are right in thinking that we are indeed written there among the forgiven, but our memories will tell us if we are being cleansed. To believe that we are really forgiven is often a great strain on a humble faith; but every conquered sin makes more vivid and real the presence and power of Christ. Besides, dread or terror may, and often does of itself, part with its force; but selfishness apart from Christ only becomes stronger. There are certainly those to whom it is dangerous to lose all dread of the wrath of God; but there can be none who shall be the poorer by losing the love of sin. No longer to dread God may end in forgetting Him; but holy obedience keeps Him ever before us, and brings

Him ever nearer to our hearts. Faith may dwindle for lack of wholesome work when it has brought to us once for all the comfort of forgiveness; but it waxes ever stronger when each day it is roused to fight with sins which, but for the resting on us of the power of a loving and present Saviour, could not have been overcome.

St. John, neither in his Gospel nor in his Epistles, takes any notice whatever of the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper. This fact makes it unlikely that he was thinking of them when he speaks of the water and the blood as witnesses to Christ. Still, it does add to our sense of the value of the truths he has been teaching by these symbols, if we remember that our Lord did give the sacraments to the church, and that they enforce the same lesson which St. John is now wishing us to learn.

CHAP. V. VV. 9-12.

If we receive the witness of men, the witness of God is greater: for the witness of God is this (for He hath borne witness concerning His Son), he that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in him: he that believeth not God hath made Him a liar; because he hath not believed in the witness that God hath borne concerning His Son. And the witness is this, that God gave unto us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. He that hath the Son hath the life; he that hath not the Son of God hath not the life.

St. John, to set forth the witness which each Christian has in himself for the being and power of Christ, has used the symbols of water and blood. These, with the Holy Spirit, are witnesses to Him. The Apostle now goes on to put this truth in another and simpler form. God has borne witness to Christ by making it clear that He is the source of life to all who believe on Him. St. John leads us to this by first setting on high the testimony of God. He began the Epistle by giving his own witness and that of the other apostles. What they had seen and heard of Jesus Christ he would tell us, that we may know what they knew of Him, and thus come to see Him as they saw Him. This testimony he has given with much force. But when he comes to

speak of the present work of Christ as cleansing the souls of men, and making them glad partakers of His propitiation, he stands aside that we may better see and listen to the three great witnesses—the Spirit, the water, and the blood—who testify to each man directly of what Christ can do, and really is doing, on earth, thus giving to each man the witness in himself. St. John had borne witness to what he had seen of Christ, and to the change in himself and in others, wrought by all that they saw of Christ while He was still with them. They came to know Him as a Divine person—as the Son of God. This testimony they expect to be believed, for the witness of man to things of the greatest weight is every day believed and acted upon. But of much greater worth than theirs is the witness of God. "*If we receive the witness of man, the witness of God is greater.*"

There is much human testimony which we lawfully doubt. Prejudice and the love of self, and the easy slothfulness which takes for granted that a first view is the only one, and troubles not itself to think and look again, all come in to weaken the force of human testimony. Still we take it, and act on it, when it is given thoughtfully by one free from selfish bias and clearly able to judge of what that really is which he has been fit to see or know. Thus it is that, even about such spiritual things as these of which St. John is speaking, we may well

receive the witness of men. If one tells us, "I came to Christ heavily laden with a sense of guilt, and I found in Him rest and peace. I came to Him a slave to sin, and He is freeing me from that bondage," we are surely bound to take him as a witness to these things, as good as to aught else which may be within the range of his knowledge. Still his is but the witness of man, and partakes therefore, it may well be, of error. Men are often very vain and conceited about their souls; they often exaggerate their religious experiences; and there are those who, having once borne such testimony, have afterwards lived down the worth of it or fallen from it. If it be given by many, who are at one in what they tell, it should certainly move the most careless to at least thoughtful questionings. It makes likely the being of a spiritual force, not belonging to man, which is clearly able to make a great change in some, though not in all, of those who have been equally told of certain strange things which are, or have happened. It makes it likely that there is such a force, but it does not put it beyond doubt. The man himself who gives the testimony feels that, however strong was the human witness which first moved him to faith, stronger far was the testimony to a living and powerful Christ given to him by the Spirit, the water, and the blood.

But it might be asked, and no doubt it was asked

by the Antichrists,—did God really bear witness to Jesus? His life was not as of one who had kindred with the Almighty, who left Him to suffer and die. It was indeed said that there were voices from heaven which called Him the Son of God, but the multitude who heard the sounds thought them to be of thunder. There were miracles too, but those who sat in Moses' seat thought they were wrought by the power of Satan. To such cavils St. John simply replies that, as a fact, "*God hath borne witness concerning His Son.*"

Neither of our versions makes this clear. The Greek stands thus, "*For this is the witness of God (for He hath borne witness concerning His Son).*" In the order of thought, the second of these clauses comes first; but having lost its place in the heat of the Apostle's writing, it stands as a parenthesis. Putting the words then in their proper order, we read—"*The witness of God is greater (for He hath borne witness concerning His Son), and the witness of God is this,*" that is, comes of this—is given to us in the fact—that there is such a thing as spiritual life, and that it comes straight from God through Jesus Christ to us. Thus, St. John does not try to answer the question—How could God bear witness to Jesus? It is enough, he thinks, simply to say that He did bear witness, and then to go on to prove this by bringing forward the fact that spiritual life has shown itself very clearly, working a great

change in the souls of men. Still the question may be pressed, and at present is eagerly pressed by those who hold that God cannot bear witness to man, and that therefore man cannot know anything of God.[1]

We cannot indeed know all that is true of God, but no man can know all that is true of any one, or of any thing. A grain of sand, a blade of grass, a flower, a bird, each may lead a child to questions, which no man can answer but by saying "I do not know," but not therefore would he add that he did not know them at all. He knows them well up to a point, from which he may go on to know them better. It is often strange to bethink ourselves of the breadth and variety of our ignorance. We have no choice but to make the best we can of a knowledge that is indeed too small to shut out all doubt and all questionings about even the plainest truths. How can I be quite sure—what rigid proof have I that this life I am leading is not a dream, like those from which I have a thousand times awaked, and that I shall not somewhere awake from it into what I shall feel to be my real life, but which also may be a dream? A man has asked himself, How do I know that the things around me are real—the things I touch and see? Nay, how do I know that there is anything outside of me—anything that is not I? Am not I myself perhaps the universe, and all that

[1] Chap. V. 20.

seems to make it up nothing but the creation of my solitary fancy? The man would seem to us to be trifling with truth who seriously asked these questions: and yet we could give no answer to him, grounded on such rigid proofs as are asked from us by those who say that we can have no witness from God. The only answer which we can make is, that there are many things which a man knows, simply because he knows them. He is sure of them, simply because he is sure of them. He has no better reason, or any other reason, to be sure of his own being than he has to be sure of the being of things that are not himself. He cannot help being equally sure of both, and also of the reality and truth, apart from him, of much besides. He may try to believe that right and wrong are mere words, but he tries in vain. He cannot disjoin cause and effect. He knows for certain that as he himself has been the cause of much that could not have been without him, that so he himself, since he knows he had a beginning, is an effect of some cause. Such things as these he knows, and he feels that he cannot help knowing them. They are to him facts. Joined to them no doubt, so as clearly to belong to them, are numberless things of which he knows little or nothing, except that if the one set of things are, the other set must also be, although he cannot see how some of them can be. But even in the midst of such

entangled thoughts no man can say, if he keeps faithfully to what he knows to be true, that he knows, and can know, nothing at all. Nay more, he cannot help starting from what he does know to search into the unknown around him; thus coming to know more and still more, yet never reaching the point where he comes out into perfectly open ground, or whence he sees nothing unknown beyond. Thus he comes to know that to him there must ever be, everywhere and in all things, the known and the unknown, the open and the closed, and that the much that he cannot see is no reason for holding that all is beyond his ken. He is sure that he does know and can know little indeed of the all, for that is clearly boundless. But that little he is quite sure he does know. There must be, as Newton saw, something between the planets and the sun, which in their mighty circling keeps them in bondage to it, as if they were bound to it by an elastic cord. No one knows, or can even guess, what that something is; yet no one would therefore say that he knows nothing of gravitation, or that it cannot testify to him of its existence and laws. That which *is*, very seldom tells us *how it is*.

St. John then was not foolish when he simply says, "*God hath borne witness to us concerning His Son.*"

There are many points, or stages, in the witness-bearing, by one man to another, when he lodges

what is in his mind in the other's mind, which are utterly hidden from us: yet this does not hinder the witness from being borne and believed. Not a day passes in which we do not become aware of much more than the mere being of some one we never saw, or heard, or heard of. A footprint in the sand, nay, three or four stones set beside each other, is enough to tell us of him: for such marks belong not to the course of nature apart from a man; and there certainly are around us here on earth, signs or traces of a Being, not man, with powers seen clearly enough, in many of their unmistakable workings, to make some points of His character anything but unknowable; and thus to testify to us of some things that are true of Him.

From among these testimonies of God to us, St. John chooses one. We find, he says, "*Life*" in the world. He means here spiritual life: but the life even of animals and plants carries with it to us a striking witness from God. There are men of large knowledge from whom we learn that they can trace through unnumbered ages an unbroken rise in the scale of being here on earth, from lifeless grains of dust up through the very small cell that feeds and reproduces itself, till at last man is reached. If it be granted, that by what is called a natural process, the lower beings through a series of unnumbered births, following each other in boundless time, in the course of which many little changes

towards the better sometimes took place, slowly grew into higher beings, then by some the need of a Creator is no longer seen, and all testimony to Himself, borne by God to us through creation, is thought to cease. But before the fact of the coming of life into the midst of this series these men stand perplexed. The chain is not unbroken. The chasm between a living thing and a dead thing is so wide that by no art can they bridge it.

The laws which rule the changes which lead to the birth of beings, fitted to live longer than their fellows, and thus to be steps in a series which ever rises to a higher and still higher point, may one day be found out, and thus a wide gap in their system may be filled up. But life, whatever it may be (and that no one knows), is certainly not anything which can spring or rise out of death. It is seen as a break in the chain, which otherwise, joined link to link, would have stretched between primeval dust and man, and a break therefore in what is called "the course of nature." It sets at nought what is upheld as a law of the universe; and, if so, by what power was the law set at nought? The beginnings of life have been seen everywhere, but never as coming from any mixtures of dead things. Yet life had a beginning, and therefore it must have had a living cause great as itself—a cause clearly to be sought for outside of matter: that is to say, in what is called the unknowable, which however

can no longer be so called, since this at least is known of it, that in it is life, and that from it life has come, and that it—the unknowable—has power enough to stand outside of the course of nature and to break through its laws—that is, to work a miracle, or, in short, to do all that is needed to testify to those who are able to know what, apart from it, the orderly course of nature would have been. For it is only by knowing what would have been, but for what is, that we know what is. We need not follow this out any further. It is enough to say that life, as it is found in the world, testifies to so much more than power in the cause of it, that we may well call that cause not *it* but "*Him*." If the facts known to us of life be granted, we come to know that there is a Being, not man, who can make breaks in the course of nature—that is, who can work a miracle; who therefore is not unknowable, since He can thus bear witness to us: and of whom, knowing something, we may go on hoping to know more.

St. John in the first verses of his Gospel has taught that the beginning and upholding of life is in Him whom he calls the Word of God. "In Him," he says, "was life." In this Epistle, however, he is speaking only of spiritual life, using a figure drawn from what is known of the body, to lead our thoughts towards what may belong also to the soul. God hath borne witness by it, St. John

says, concerning His Son, and he adds that not to believe this witness is to make God a liar.

We may easily see what he means by this. In the earlier days of that science, which has read so much of the history of our globe as written by God Himself on great tables of stone, there were good men who wished to hold fast to what seemed to them the date of creation, as given in their Bibles. When they were told that the world must have had being, not for a few thousand years, but for countless ages, because there were shells found, and the bones and scales of fishes, and the marks of rain drops and wave ripples in rocks, above which miles in depth of other rocks had been laid down by water and fire; they tried to put aside these facts, by holding that the shells and fish had never been alive, but had been made at first by God of stone in the place where they were found. They did not see that by thus striving to honour God, by upholding what they thought to be His scriptures in a book, they were really dishonouring Him by denying the truth of what were as certainly His scriptures on the rocks. It is in quite the same way that we dishonour God, and make Him untruthful, if we deny the witness which He has borne, and is bearing, to us by what we see in the spiritual world. In that world we may gather much testimony given by Him to us about many truths. But what St. John would have us see is that in it God bears

witness to us by the sign of giving to us spiritual life, which shall clearly come to us in and with His Son Jesus Christ, and thus testify to us (who have mastered the language which God uses, and thus understand that testimony) that Christ is His Son, having the glory as of the Only Begotten of the Father.

Those who have never learned how very far apart are spiritual life and spiritual death can scarcely see the force of this testimony. All that they can be asked to do is to notice a change, surely very striking, made in the world by the coming into it of Christianity. They may not think well of that change, they may point out its shortcomings; but they cannot but see that there was a very real change made then, as it is still made, when savage tribes come to hear of Christ, and when men known to ourselves become Christians in deed and in truth, and not in name only. This change St. John would say is from death to life. That he has any right to speak so strongly of it some may not grant; but they cannot but allow that there is a change curious and striking, and not to be well seen as having any natural causes.

It is quite fair to urge, on those who are not Christians, this testimony on a large scale, which we think God has borne to Christ. But it is not of it, or of such use of it, that St. John is here thinking. He is speaking only of the witness which God bears

to us, meaning by "*us*," Christian believers tempted, as were his "children," to doubt that Jesus is the Son of God. He asks no man to find this witness in any history save in that of himself. For the awakening of the world from its unbroken death in selfishness, for its rise from Pagan degradation, and its escape from Jewish formalism, there may perhaps be found causes of the force of which the unlearned man cannot judge. But of what has happened to himself he can judge. He knows that, in St. John's sense of the word, he was once dead in sin, but that now he is a living soul. He is not insensible, and blind, and purposeless, and useless, nor is he wandering and stumbling year after year into deeper sin. He feels, he sees, he knows, that his soul is alive, and that his life came, not from himself, but was kindled in him when he came to Christ. Of whom, if one said to him, "What did He unto thee? how gave He thee this life?" his only answer may well be—"How He gave me life I know not, but this one thing I know, that whereas I was dead, now I am alive." The questioner may not think this enough; but as for the man himself, he knows that through this change from death to life, which he is sure was not wrought by himself, God hath witnessed to him that spiritual life is in His Son Jesus Christ, who has lifted from his soul the burden of guilt, and is now cleansing it from all sin. He now "*hath the Son of God,*" and with

Him he "*hath the life.*" He once "*had not the Son of God,*" and then he "*had not the life.*" This witness he has "*in him.*"

What he thus knows of himself he knows to be true also of others around him. What he has himself gone through fits him to understand what has befallen them. He sees as a fact in himself and in them that Jesus Christ is the giver of life. No doubt the life He implants has at first to struggle with the numbness of death. The soul that is quickened comes forth like Lazarus from his tomb, pale and faint and encumbered with grave bands. It takes more than a moment, it may take a lifetime, before the command is fully carried out, "Loose him and let him go." It is for the most part a slow process by which the quickened soul gets clear of all the sins which closely beset it. But long ere that is done it has come forth evidently alive, and full witness has been borne by its life to the fact that "*God hath given us eternal life, and that that life is in His Son.*"

Chap. V. v. 13.

These things have I written unto you, that ye may know that ye have eternal life, even unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God.

St. John has now come to the end of all he wished to say when he began this Epistle. In the first

chapter he had said that, by what he was going to write, he hoped to give fulness of joy to himself and to us. Here he changes the form in which his wish is put. He has written, he says, that all believers in Christ may know that they have eternal life. Clearly then he thought that the full joy he wished us to have comes from knowing, through the signs he has given us, that we are no longer spiritually dead,—in being aware as a fact that we are not unfeeling, blind, useless, ever falling into what we know and feel to be a deeper and still deeper state of evil—that the hard, cold, selfish heart has been softened and warmed into life, so that it is now touched with a loving and tender feeling towards God and man. If a love of this Godlike kind has been shed abroad in our hearts, if we have thus become in some measure partakers of the Divine nature, then are we able to understand God in the fulness of His charity, and to be in real communion with Him—seeing, feeling, judging, and walking as He does, and therefore sharing in His blessedness. This is the life which Christ means when He says "I have come that they may have life, and have it abundantly."[1]

It may indeed be said that the life given by Christ is judicial relief from that sentence to spiritual death, which follows justly on the act of sin. This is true, if care be taken to think of the sinner as put to

[1] John X. 10.

spiritual death, not by God, but by the sinner himself. That which comes of sin is indeed spiritual death (Rom. vi. 23); but of this God is not the cause, for God cannot be thought of as tempting to sin, far less as forcing the sinner to go on in sin. He desires not the death of the sinner, though His justice cannot but see in it the outcome of that eternal righteousness which had its large share in fixing what was to be the nature of man when he was at first made. We must take this view of spiritual death, as the loss of all right to live, if we are to see with any clearness the need of Christ's sacrifice for us. St. John does not forget this, for he has spoken of Christ as the propitiation for our sins, but he does not dwell upon it. He saw that there could be no such thing as a condemned living soul, or a pardoned dead soul, since condemnation carries with it, or rather is in itself, spiritual death, while spiritual life goes along with God's favour. Except in words the one does not really go before or after the other, for they are bound up together. And it is because to be sentenced to spiritual death and to die that death are in fact the same, that pardon also is really one with the gift of spiritual life. This we may be sure St. John saw; but it is of the actual death and life of the soul, and not of anything judicial in either, that he is speaking here. The fact which he wishes us to see is that not only is a legal right to live given back by Christ to the

child of God, but that in Christ he is actually made alive. Ye, he says to us if we be Christians, have now here on earth eternal life; Christ has already given it to you, hereafter you will reach the full growth of it. But it is given to the soul, though it be only as an undying seed, in the very hour in which it is by faith made one with Christ. St. John then would have us not to *believe* that we have eternal life, but to "*know*" that we have it; and his aim has been to show us how, without risk of mistake, we may reach this knowledge, and thus have fulness of joy.

That St. John has this aim, and that he takes so great pains to reach it, shows us that he never doubted that a man may have eternal life, and not know that he has it; just as another may be sure that he has that life, and yet not have it. As on the one hand there are those whose overweening self-love leads them to think far too highly of their spiritual state, so are there others whose lowliness makes too little of the proof they have of their real fellowship with God, as given by the work of His Spirit in their hearts. They had been unselfish and full of kindness not to one, but to many of the brethren of Christ; but they had never thought that they had done anything for, far less unto, Christ. It may perhaps be not until the great day that they shall learn the truth about themselves. They had never understood while on earth whence came the

tender sympathy, the loving heart, and the growth in them of these graces which led them to think of the sick and the prisoner, and are the true signs of the life eternal, which God through Christ had planted in them. They had not passed through all the stages of feeling, without which the reality of the Christian life is so often denied, so that they had doubted, or at the least did not know, that they had eternal life.

St. John thinks that such doubts do not come so much from want of faith as from losing sight of the truths which fill this Epistle, and to which Christ set His seal when He says that a tree is known by looking at its fruits, and not by digging down till we can see its roots. But we are for the most part so ashamed of any fruits we may bear to the praise of God, that we turn from them, in the hope that, if we can get down to the hidden workings of our souls, we may, by a free use of our fancy, find there that which may let us think somewhat better of our state, forgetting that it is with us as with a tree, the parts of which above ground balance those which are below. The unmistakable facts of our dealings with our neighbours are clearly the only trustworthy tests of the strength or reality of our spiritual life in Christ. Our growth in grace may be very slow and stunted, the shoots we push heavenward may be blighted before they are ripe enough to stand the winter storms, the fruits they bear may be small and

worthless; but, such as they are, they are signs of life, and the only signs of it which will not mislead us. They show that life is in us, and that can be none other than the life which is hid with Christ in God[1]; for against it death is ever struggling, yet it is daily overcoming death, and shall never cease to overcome it till death is swallowed up in victory, for this life is eternal.

St. John then has written this Epistle that, by telling us what are the trustworthy signs of this life, we may know that we have it, or—and this is of even greater worth—that those who have it not may know that it is not in them. For the history of the church, in any age, largely tells us that the fancies of men as to what goes to the making of spiritual life are many and strange. Errors, and these sometimes even deadly, here lie so thick that there are surely very few Christians on earth who would not walk with less of stumbling, if they kept steadily in mind the teaching of this Epistle, and used from day to day the guidance towards the truth about themselves which it gives them. Men can, as we know, wrest to their own destruction some of the words of St. Paul, but not to any grievous loss can any one wrest what St. John has written. He may indeed lead us to write many bitter things against ourselves; he may cover us with shame. As he speaks, we lay our faces in the dust; our only cry may be, "God

[1] 1 Col. III. 3.

be merciful to us sinners." But he, whose one prayer that was, went down to his house justified rather than the other, whose state before God seemed to himself so good. For as an uneasy restlessness breaking in on the quietness of a sick child gives hope that he may yet live, so a strong displeasure with ourselves is surely a sign that health is returning to the soul. It is the beginning of that hungering and thirsting after righteousness which our Lord blesses with the promise of one day filling it. No man can ever be much the worse for thinking too ill of himself; our danger lies quite in the other way.

But St. John would not have us think that to bring down every high thought of our own worth was the only or indeed the chief aim of his Epistle. He writes it that our joy may be full; only let us note what kind of joy he means, and whence its fulness is to come. It is a greedy and erring spirit that grasps at joy as if it were the first thing to be straightway gathered even from the best things in this or any other world. They therefore are misled who make it the first fruit of Christian faith. With St. Paul love goes before it in the order of the fruits wrought in us by the Holy Spirit (Gal. v. 22), and St. John would teach us that to love as Christ loved us is the only lasting source of joy. For no one knows better than He that among the things which bring only a gladness which dies in its birth, are

those forms of spiritual death which, like the shoots which spring from the trunk of a felled tree, seem for a little to be full of life.

The dead soul may be, and often is, stirred by the touch of outward things to movements irregular, discordant, objectless, spasmodic, so that, like a galvanized body, it seems alive. No doubt the Holy Spirit of God may sometimes use such means to break as it were the spell of spiritual death, and to stir towards the first awakenings of spiritual life. But for the most part such emotions, if they be joyful, are purely selfish, and, like all selfish pleasures, lose their taste when the fresh newness of them is gone. They are like the sudden blaze of thorns, which scorches and blackens, but dies into ashes before it can be used in offering sacrifice to God or service to man. Hence it is that St. John in this Epistle dwells on the strange worth of a Godlike love, which finds joy in the very act of seeking no joy. He values faith not because it straightway brings gladness, but because it leads to love, and thus makes us partakers at once of the nature and blessedness of God, who, because He is Love, is Most High and blessed for ever more, and at the same time disjoins us for ever from the nature and misery of the devil, who is the devil, always wretched, because he is the embodiment of selfish hatred. If then we listen to St. John we shall find that if we for the sake of others set present joy quite in the second place—and this

true love, like that of Christ, will ever do—we really enter into the fulness of it. It is to our great loss that we do not always, or even often, believe this; and yet there are few men who have not been more than once surprised into the joy of a hearty unselfishness. It can only be for the sake of keeping up an unbroken faith in worldliness that any man can say that the hour in which he forgot himself in thinking of others was not among the happiest of his life.

As for the signs given us by St. John, whereby we may know that we are spiritually alive, they are, we see, all to be found in the change from love of self to love to God and our neighbour—from grasping to giving, from making others serve us to trying to serve them. "*We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren. He that loveth not abideth in death.*" No words can be clearer than these.

Of that great eternity which belongs to this spiritual life, we cannot now speak particularly. The glory of it is to be revealed "*in us*," not now "*to us*." "It was never yet manifested what we shall be." What it is for the corruptible to put on incorruption, and the mortal immortality; what to escape from the narrowness of our present being, and to live where time shall be no more, we cannot tell; such change is outside of all we have known or can here know. That we shall see Christ as He

is, and be ourselves like Him, sums up all that St. John can tell us of that hereafter, when "mortality shall be swallowed up of life," and we have come to "bear the image of the heavenly." But to exchange faith, with the doubts which belong to it, for sight, with its unclouded views of God; to see Him no longer darkly, but face to face; no more to thirst after Him, and to have to seek Him, sometimes with no better hope than that haply we may find Him, but to rest beside Him, having ceased from all wandering among sins and follies; to have as our best no longer the clouded happiness of an ever threatened present, but to live in a boundless atmosphere of unchanging holiness and love,—all this, but clearly much more than this, belongs to the issues of eternal life. Our fancy flying upwards sees and hears, before it reaches even the first heaven, that which it is "impossible for a man to utter," for the word eternal carries with it meanings as little to be defined as the memories of a dream. But whatever we may be able to see or feel about eternal life, St. John would have us connect all with Jesus Christ. They alone have this life who "*believe in the name of the Son of God.*" For whatever may belong to it hereafter, this sense of the glory of Christ, as the Most High, belongs to it now. St. John has no doubt, as we have seen, that all who have eternal life are able, with the open eye of the heart, if not of the intellect, to behold as he did in

the life and death of Jesus the glory as of the Only Begotten of the Father.

Chap. V. vv. 14, 15.

And this is the boldness which we have toward Him, that, if we ask anything according to His will, He heareth us: and if we know that He heareth us whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions which we have asked of Him.

If he, who with the heart believes in Jesus as the Son of God, knows that he has spiritual life, he reaches, from having it as well as from knowing that he has it, fulness of joy. He sees God to be a reality, a Being who feels and cares and loves, a Being the greatest of all, the Most High, venerable but not formidable, having towards us here on earth a Father's heart,—a Being to be obeyed, but also to be trusted. So that we may have what St. John calls "*boldness towards Him,*" not shrinking from before Him, but gladly drawing near Him.

To be able to see God aright, knowing, understanding, and joyfully trusting Him, is of all that man can reach on earth the best and highest. To escape from the bondage of the slave into the freedom of the child,—no longer to drag ourselves before God as a duty, but to be ever drawn towards Him by sympathy and love,—to know that it pleases Him that each and any of us, anywhere, and at any

time, may speak to Him, pouring out our hearts before Him, with all our doubts, and griefs, and sins,—to be sure that we are thus touching the very heart of God, and that all His wisdom and power thus become in a sense ours, His grace being made sufficient for us, and His strength being perfected in our weakness,—to live such a life as this, ever seeing Him who is invisible, is what St. John means by the "*boldness*" which we have towards God, and what St. Paul by "access in confidence to the Father."[1]

Such access is not always clearly open; nay, the way into the presence of God sometimes seems closed as with a brazen door. Just as the light is joyful which the presence of God brings with it, so is the horror of thick darkness when the brightness of His face is not seen. Therefore will it sometimes be with strong crying and tears, as of a child for a lost father, that a Christian will offer up prayers and supplications, as Christ also did. But often too will a happy mood of thankfulness be broken by a sense of need pressing on himself or on those beside him. For here there is no escape from sickness, and sorrow, and anxiety, and temptation. These tormentors are ever with us or near us. Thus the Christian cannot but pray. For what can be more certain than that the man who knows God, and is not afraid of Him, cannot help asking many things from God?

[1] Eph. III. 12.

In truth, to a God who sees the heart, all wishes are prayers, if along with them there is the feeling that they are known to God and that the fulfilment of them is in His hands.

What is called prayer is often very unlike all that prayer ought to be. In all ages of the world there seems to have been a belief that powers outside of man, unseen, undefined, without character or will of their own, yet great, could be made the blind slaves of the will of man by means of certain actions or gestures, or of a set of words or sounds—a strange belief, clearly left behind by some more noble faith which had died. It has shown itself in the use of charms, or amulets, or incantations, and by the wide-spread habit of propitiating fortune or luck. The ways by which it has been fancied that unseen powers could be forced by man to serve him have been many and strange; but in some shape they more or less openly have taken, and still keep, their hold on all sorts of men. Christianity has done much to weaken faith in them, but it has by no means put an end to it. Even those who live in the full light of the truth feel, as a real temptation, a readiness to fall into the use of what are really magical rites. They are aware with shame that they often bring down to the level of an incantation their prayers to God. Without any quick sense of His Being, or clear thought of His character, they put their bodies into unwonted postures, they utter cer-

tain words or sounds, and they feel as if they had thus turned aside some evil, and made sure of some good. Or perhaps, without any pressing fear or longing, they shield themselves against mischance for the day by looking in the morning on a page of the Bible, and muttering on their knees some set of words. Meanwhile, God as a reality has not been in all their thoughts, and as little the sense and force of the words they had read or uttered. Their reading has been simply a charm, their prayer an incantation, and their faith in these, as bringing any good to them, a perverted instinct which had lost the way to God.

It cannot be doubted that this is true of those whose Christianity is a matter only of habit. But it shows the depth of that fall from God, up from which the best of His children are but climbing, that few, if any, of them can never blame themselves for this emptiness of prayer. There are probably not many Christians who have not often felt that there were days when the only real words they had uttered before God were spoken when, rising with shame from their knees, they said—"O God, teach us to pray, for pray we cannot." Hence the value of the promise of the Holy Spirit as "a spirit of grace and supplications," who will teach us how to pray.

But such men will often pray more truly when not thinking of themselves as praying. Many, if

not all, of them have set times when they try, sometimes with success, to hold real converse with God. Yet it is not always from within the closed door of a secret chamber that the truest prayers go up. There are days when a man, going about his daily task, has a heart so full that he can do nothing but pray, and sleepless nights when, threatened by some great evil, he never ceases to cry to God. There will be moments too when an old sin rises to threaten him with evil yet to come of it, or when a strong temptation fills him with fear—moments of doubt when he does not know what to believe or to do, or how he may longer stand under a weight that is crushing him; when the prayer of the man will, without any words, be but a single thought sent upwards towards God, and yet be the most real and the soonest answered of all the prayers he ever uttered. For in that moment he feels that the wisdom and strength, but, above all, the loving sympathy of a present God, are with him. The man who really knows God does not so much try to pray; it is that he cannot but pray. When he sets himself to pray as a duty, then it is that he runs the risk of not praying at all.

There are no doubt many reasons why the believing boldness of Christians is of unequal strength. It belongs to what is sinless in character that there are natures which cannot stand alone and others which cannot lean: so that, while there are those

whose faith goes out in many prayers to God, there are others, not less faithful, who are driven to ask help from Him only when all else has failed. Still, if there be faith in God, there will be prayer to Him, just as to a man who has a real friend on earth the time will come, soon with some, later with others, when the wants of his heart will be opened to that friend. From an earthly friend we may hold ourselves back, because we do not wish to uncover to him our hidden need, or we may doubt whether he can enter into the sort of care which is weighing us down, or we do not wish to vex him by asking from him what perhaps he cannot give or do. But, if we know God, we must be aware that none of these hindrances need keep us from prayer to Him. He already knows of us all we could tell Him. Christ has already made us sure of His boundless sympathy. The wealth of His wisdom and power cannot fail. How can we then, who know this, but pray to Him? No reasoning can keep us from God when we see Him on the one side, and on the other our pressing need. If faith have any life, distress can scarcely have made it so weak but that it will pray, even though all it feels is that there *may* be a God to hear and save. Just as a man, swept from his foothold in a midnight torrent, will cry for help, though he knows not of any one who is near, how much more will the Christian certainly pray who believes that God, his Father, is close beside him?

It is indeed true that the world by wisdom knows not God; and it is that wisdom of the world which easily denies the use of prayer. It can so speak about God as to show clearly that He is not to be turned from His course by the jarring cries which reach Him from the earth. It belongs to His greatness that He should be unmoved by such noise. But if unmoved by the trust that is in prayer, then must he be equally unmoved by any thought, or word, or deed of the creature. Sin cannot touch Him, or sorrow, or injustice. He cannot pity, or love, or be displeased. Such a God stands lower than the weakest man, who has feelings to be moved and can form a purpose and carry it out. Weak as he is he can break in on the even march of nature, and force her, as his servant, to turn aside and do his will. But a God who cannot answer prayer can do none of these things. Like a cloud or a star He may be in heaven; but He is only the blind slave of necessity, or rather a name for necessity, which itself is an empty word, for, as it could not be self-arranged, it must, in so far as it is arranged, have owed its fixed order at some time to some one who had purpose and will.

In short, this God who cannot answer prayer is not God at all. That great name has been given not to a being, but to that well-balanced order by which the Most High has put His stamp of His thought and wisdom on this world in which we live,

and over which He has not ceased to rule. Clearly, if we believe that this world did not make and arrange itself, we must also believe that the things which happen in it follow each other in unchanging order, only in so far as He, who gave them that order and upholds them in it, wills it to be unchanging. It is less likely than the wildest fable that a necessity, if we must so call it, set out and ordered with harmonies so perfect, is not the outcome of the thought and feeling of One who still thinks and feels, and who holds fast the power of showing forth in new ways, if He pleases, His thought and feeling. Who or what then is there to hinder Him doing so? He who arranged can disarrange if so He pleases.

But it may be said that, even if we use the word God as meaning something more than the orderly course of natural law, and think of God as a Being to whom belong character and will and design, we do not get rid of all difficulty about prayer. For is it not true, that among the many things which may be done by such an One in any set of circumstances, there is only one which is the best to be done, and that He will and must do that best thing without minding the wishes or prayers of any, whoever they may be, who wish Him to do something else? But this takes it for granted that the wish or prayer of one of His children has no place among the circumstances which God takes into account, as

making that best to be done by Him which without it would not have been best. We cannot, without selfishness, treat as of no weight the wish of a neighbour. That a God of love should do so cannot be. We may be very sure that the wish or prayer of a man, made by God in His own image, cannot seem to Him too trifling to move His purpose or will. Apart from Christ, indeed, we might doubt this. But when we see pity for us moving God to what we may call breaks so vast in the natural order of things as were the incarnation and death of Christ, our faith is strengthened to believe in the far smaller breaks in that order which answers to prayer may need. But indeed, as we have seen, the humiliation of the Son of God seems no break in the order of the universe to one who believes that God is Love. Still less can that order seem to them broken by answers to prayer.

It may further be said that the facts or states of mind within the compass of the universe are surely as real and weighty, to a God who knows them, as any thing that is true of the matter in it. They cannot but have a place of strength among the many things which must move the will of any kind of god who has a will to be moved at all; much more the will of our God, who cannot but give much power, among His motives, to human feeling, for truly this world would not be ordered by love if the cries of the unhappy in it were unheeded.

No doubt, had the universe been made up only of things that had no real life, being mere mechanisms driven by a power outside of themselves, then there could be no prayer nor any answer to prayer. All things would then be simply the embodiment of the Maker of the vast mechanism, and every part and movement of it but the outcome of His thought, and thus be really Himself, as much as our bodies and all they do are ourselves. And so, indeed, it is in the world with all things except man, who, made in the image of God, has, to say no more of him, a will and a purpose, and a sphere in which he is free to choose, and a power also to search and find out what is and has been, and to make, or even (so far as thought goes) to create, what never has been. Such a being living in the world brings, by what he does, changes into it. But clearly, by thoughts and feelings which are truly his own, he equally alters the state of the spiritual world so that it cannot be the same as it would have been had he not thought and felt. It is thus that man's freedom, as a being made in the image of God, enables him by his prayers to make the order of the universe other than it would have been had he not prayed. It is because we are not machines that we can pray and do much by prayer. But, indeed, reasonings, whether for or against the use of prayer, will neither help nor hinder in his prayers the believer in Christ, just as he will breathe neither better nor worse

because he has read in a book of the good that comes of breathing. He knows that, whatever else God may be, He is his best Friend—nay, his true Father—and that therefore, if His children "*ask any thing, He heareth them,*" and that His love takes into account, and gives real weight to, their prayers.

Real weight, and yet oftentimes that weight must be small indeed when set beside the other reasons, great, all-wise, far-seeing, on which God acts. For the prayers of God's children are often so narrow and short-sighted, so foolish and even selfish, that the wisdom, the love, the righteousness of God could not grant them. There is no infant on whom has dawned the first gleam of sense who does not begin to understand that his father cannot give him everything which he asks; and the Christian who really knows God may well believe that He is neither cruel nor unfaithful when He sets aside, as not to be answered, many prayers. These, we know, are not magical rites which force a blind, mindless being to obey our will. We are sure of His love, which listens to our prayers with tender pity, but not less sure of His wisdom, which cannot but often see that it would be foolish or even cruel to grant them. In the folk-lore of all nations are to be found tales which turn on the miseries of a man to whom had been granted the certain fulfilment of three wishes; and it needs little thought to see how great the danger would be to us, foolish and short-

sighted as we are, if we had only to form, not three wishes, but any wish, to have it straightway granted. Were it so, who could dare to pray? What ruin would follow to ourselves, to our neighbours—nay, to the universe—if prayer had the power which some would give it! How wild and boundless the chaos, without form and void, which would speedily take the place of the goodly order of God's dealings with us if prayer gave, even to the wisest of men, the free use of the power of God; how much more if it gave to the thousands who pray the means of carrying out their endlessly diverse wishes!

Hence the clearness with which it is set down here that it is only when that which we ask is "*according to the will of God*" He heareth us. Were no such bound set we could neither desire nor think that God would promise to answer our prayer. Those alone can find fault with it who think of the will of God as unguided by wisdom and love. If we think of that will as giving due weight to all that bears on the future, as seen by Him in the pure and most clear light in which everything is open to Him, no prayer of ours will be without the words, "Let Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven." It would indeed be a far stranger world than it is if in it men could not only act themselves, but be able to make God also act as they pleased. We may be sure that God has left such power in the hands of no man, even though it should be only within

the narrow lines of dealing with bodily disease. The good, but surely not very thoughtful, men who seem to believe in the certain cure of all ailments by prayer, give an example of what may be called a devout misunderstanding of God.

No doubt, were we in full communion with God, and already "in the light as He is in the light," did we know the truth as He knows it, were we not for the most part walking in a vain show, then every wish of ours would be at one with the will of God. As it is, we cannot help feeling that many of His thoughts are certainly not our thoughts. Therefore it must be enough for us to know that all our prayers are heard by God, and that while many of them must be unanswered, because they are in His sight foolish and blind, all of them are put in the scale in which His purposes are weighed, and that some of them are weighty enough with Him to turn it, and thus to make a change, small indeed it may be, but yet a change, in all that shall be. For as we know that a child cannot lift a stone from the ground without that little effort being felt in the most distant star, so in the spiritual world a wish cannot come from the heart of one of God's children without having its little place among the spiritual forces which, through the will of God, shape the future of the universe. This is indeed true of all the thoughts and feelings and acts of any man. Not one of them can be without its end-

less chain of results. But our sense of God's might and of our own weakness needs the truth that a real prayer will make the future of him who offers it, and of those for whom it is made, better, in some way, than it would have been had the prayer never been uttered: inasmuch as it has not escaped into a great void, but has found and touched the heart of God.

"Ye know not what ye ask" was the answer of our Lord to a prayer made to Him by two of His disciples. Did He speak aloud to most of us, when on our knees, He would often use the same words. Not only because that which we ask would hurt us if we got it, but often also because even when we seek from God His best gifts—those which He has promised us, and is most willing to give—the first sight of them as they came to us would, like Christ walking on the sea, grievously affright us, and force from us the most eager prayer that they might straightway be withdrawn. As a child wrung by pain begs its mother to make it well, and then beseeches her with many tears to take away the physic which alone could help it, so do we come to God, grieving over the weakness of our faith, and the deadness of our hearts, and the power which evil often has over us, beseeching Him to give us strength and unselfishness, and triumph over all our sins (for we long to sit in heavenly places with Jesus Christ); and yet when God, having heard us,

begins to heal us by those most loving and wholesome pains whereby alone He could fulfil our righteous longings, we forthwith cry out, as if He had forgotten to be gracious, and pray Him to leave us alone. How often do Christian men in this way say nay to their best prayers; and how often afterwards have they come to see the greatness of the love and wisdom of God, in not granting some of them, in forcing them, in spite of their strong crying and tears, to drink of the cup that Christ drank of; thus making them at least better (if not, like their Master, perfect) through sufferings. How many lessons are we taught by the words, "Father, if it be *possible*, let this cup pass from Me."

It is likely that thinking thus we may reach some right understanding of verse 15, "*We know that God hears us whatsoever we ask*,"—that He listens to us and knows what we really wish. But we ourselves do not always, or even often, know what we are really wishing. Our prayers, therefore, even when they are very true, may ask what we do not most crave. We are uneasy and restless under some burden, but with a clear sight of only a very small part of that which is pressing on us. Had we time or calmness to take a larger view, our wishes would take another line, and the prayer we had uttered would be withdrawn. God takes for His children this calmer and larger view. He has heard their cry, and is moved by the love and trust in

Him that was in it. They have laid hold on His strength, they have brought themselves one step nearer to Him, and certainly not to their hurt. The real, the deep, the true wish of their heart, as God sees it, shall be fulfilled; but for that very reason the wish they have uttered shall not be granted. Beneath these wants, as we feel them, often lies as their source a far greater want, which is not felt, just as behind the symptoms of an ailment there is the hidden mischief which causes them. These symptoms, as detailed by the sufferer, the physician must interpret that he may find out from them what the evil is which he must cure if they are to be healed. Not otherwise does God interpret our prayers. These, as we make them, He translates into those we would have made had we seen all that He sees and known all that He knows. It is clearly one of the first duties of faith to make us sure of this, and, therefore, of the likelihood that God will not give us the very thing we have asked in a prayer; though we may well believe that it will be a part of that which God does give, though so hidden in it as that we cannot at once see that it is there. Of all this the believer ought to be very sure, and, therefore, to know that the things which happen to him are really the petitions which he asked, come to him—in a strange form it may be, but yet the only form in which a loving but wise Father could send them. And, indeed, if we are

thinking only of prayer for ourselves, we may see that if God has given us the faith and trust and love towards Himself which makes it possible worthily to pray, He has already bestowed in these gifts all other things which a large and far-reaching faith could wish to be given in answer to prayer, and that we thus actually have the petitions which we asked of Him. If we listen first to Matthew[1] and then to Luke,[2] when they tell us of what Christ said of the Father's generosity, we shall see that the gift of all good things, and the gift of the Holy Spirit, are in the sight of Christ really one and the same.

This and much more might be said on the 16th verse. But it may be best, instead of trying to disentangle from St. John's words all the thought that may be in them, to look on them as setting forth to those who could understand and believe such a message, a very high, but surely possible, exercise of faith, whereby a man having uttered a prayer to God waits not to ask or to guess in what shape, or when, an answer to it will come. He is sure that His prayer is already granted, and that the answer will come to him in the best way and at the best time. He has cast his care upon God, who cares for him. He has put himself into His hands, and without a single curious question he leaves himself there and is at rest. It is with him

[1] Matt. VII. 11. [2] Luke XI. 13.

as when a man hemmed in by dangerous foes, if once sure that his message asking help has reached a true and resourceful friend, is equally sure that the help he needs is already on foot, though he cannot know anything of what his friend is doing or going to do. Such trust belongs only to a nature generous and faithful as that of the friend on whom it rests, and the man who has it in his prayers to God must already be as like to God, and as far on his way to the larger knowledge of God as man while on earth can reach.

Chap. V. vv. 16, 17.

If any man see his brother sinning a sin not unto death, he shall ask, and God will give him life for them that sin not unto death. There is a sin unto death: not concerning this do I say that he should make request. All unrighteousness is sin: and there is a sin not unto death.

St. John is sure that God will hear and answer the prayers of His children, if what they ask be according to His will. But no one of them will pray only for himself. Indeed, if a child of God has the Christ-like love, which rightly belongs to him, he will more often pray for others. If he sees any one in need, in sorrow, in danger, he will surely do for him whatever he can, looking on all God has given to himself, be it much or little, as

his for that end. He will ask further help from God only when he has used to the uttermost all that he already has. For to ask God to do, either for ourselves or our neighbour, what we ourselves have already the means of doing belongs neither to faith nor to love. Meanwhile, knowing that he lacks wisdom, he will pray God to guide him to the best way of giving help, and to hinder any harm which might come of his mistakes. It is when he feels his helplessness in the view of many of his neighbour's troubles that he will try, for his sake, to lay hold of the strength of Him, who is of a tender pity greater than any felt by man on earth. He will do this when his neighbour's worldly distresses are before him, his want it may be of daily food or of health, ever remembering, however, that God, for the wisest ends, often sends such troubles. But above all, having felt in himself the greater misery which comes of sin, and knowing that apart from God he cannot take it away from his brother, he will, if he sees him sinning, betake himself on his behalf to God, praying Him with all earnestness to give life to the unhappy man who has fallen on spiritual death.

It is often said of Christians, by those who oppose themselves, that if they really believed their creed about the fearful issues of sin, they would spend their time in nothing else than in trying to save people from it. This, which we may all feel to be

a not unfair reproach, *they* certainly cannot cast off who do nothing by work or prayer to save those whom they know to be living in sin. If we see a brother sinning a sin, and do not ask God to give us life for him, St. John would not be slow to say of us that we were hating our brother, and were murderers, because we had let him die when if we had prayed we might have saved him from death. For St. John has no doubt that if we ask life for a sinning brother God will give us life for him.

But it may be said that if it is so clearly the part of Christian love to work towards and pray for life for a sinning brother, it belongs equally, if not more, to the greater pity of the God who created him, to give that life to him without being moved thereto by our prayers. Now, while we know that all thought of prayer, as well as of God's dealings with dead souls, may readily touch a point which lies beyond the range of our understanding, it need not seem strange to us if we find God promising to do, in answer to prayer, that which He would certainly have done, or indeed is doing, apart from prayer. For, as we have seen, prayer is and can be only one, and often far from the strongest, of the many reasons which together move the will of God. But indeed what St. John here says does not lead us into the midst of questions such as these. His words are that if we pray to God for a sinning brother, life will be given to "*us*" for the brother.

God will put into our hands the means, whatever these means be, by which he may be brought back to spiritual life. Words will be put into our mouths by God, or He will lead us to acts which shall tend towards bringing the fallen man to repentance and newness of life. Thus the gift bestowed in answer to such prayer is rather to the man who prays than to him for whom he prays. It is in this way that God meets our longing for the good of others, by making us fellow-workers with Himself in all that He is unweariedly doing for the sinful brother. For he, of whom St. John is thinking, is not one who knew not Christ or the Gospel. He is a brother, and therefore one to whom God had once given spiritual life, and to whom He is Himself now doubtless using means to bring it back. It is not then on the sinful brother that, in answer to prayer, any new and strange work is wrought. It is on the man who prays. God now makes him the instrument of His ever-active mercy—the channel through which life from Him, who is the only source of life, is sent to the fallen brother. God gives *us* life *for him*.

This is indeed a beautiful provision of the grace of God. If we pray for another, God makes ourselves the means of answering our own prayer. Our work is not done when we have besought for our sinful brother the mercy of God. We have, as it were, laid him in faith at the feet of God, who

thus gives him back to our care, and with him the means, be they what they may, by the wise and unwearied use of which we may have the joy of bringing him again to spiritual life.

But this life given by God through us may, even as when it is given by God apart from us, fail to quicken the sinning man. It may be scorned and cast away by him to whom it is brought, through whatever channel. This must be kept in mind if we are not to fall into doubt of the pity of God for those who are sinning, or of His faithfulness in answering our prayers for them. For it may happen that prayer shall be made, but clearly in vain, for many sinful men who seemed to be, or really had been, brethren. It was of this, no doubt, that St. John was thinking when he lessens our hope in praying for a sinning brother by telling us that God will give us life for him only if he has not sinned what is here called "*a sin unto death*."

With very painful feeling it has often been asked what that sin is. No doubt those to whom St. John was writing knew what he meant. The sin, therefore, was one likely to be wrought among them, and to belong to the dangers from which St. John in this Epistle would shield them. It must be a sin too of which no one but a brother—a Christian—one of themselves, could be guilty. It must, moreover, be a deed, an open act, so unmistakably evil that not even the largest charity could cover it.

Further, it must be a sin, springing not from sudden temptation, from which, when wrought, the soul turns to God with self-hatred and shame, but a sin wilfully wrought with thought and mind, a sin of the whole heart.

Having then such marks of it, we may find out what sin it was about which St. John was so hopeless. For there were, among those to whom he was writing, men once belonging to the Christian brotherhood who had come to say not only that there was no such thing as sin, but who had denied that Jesus was the Son of God, and who hated Christians. They, not in word only, but in feeling, had broken the Christian tie, and as Antichrists had gone out from Christian fellowship, having lost all sense of any glory in Christ. They were indeed of the same kind as those whose wretched state the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews portrays as having sinned openly and wilfully after they "had received the knowledge of the truth"; as having "trod under foot the Son of God, and counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith they had been sanctified, a common thing, and done despite to the spirit of grace."[1] There were such men then, and there have been such men since, men whose fall is not into a mere shallow error of the understanding, and who are wrong about words. Were that all, we may well believe that in God's sight their sin

[1] Heb. VI. 4; X. 29.

would not be accounted deadly. These were wilful, thoughtful, hearty apostates, who knew what they were doing when they cast themselves loose from the tender love of Christ and crucified Him afresh. Their all but hopeless danger lies in this, that, having known the way of life, they found it so distasteful as that they made up their minds to leave it; and this with so clear an understanding of it that the hope is weak that any fresh truth, or any new way of putting truth, shall ever draw them back to Christ or lessen their dislike to Him. For it is what is *true* of Him that displeases them. The whole bias of their nature has been set against Him; their heart is at enmity to Him as He really is. If they could only be renewed to repentance so as to turn again to God, He would, we know, forgive them; but their misery is that they will never turn. No strength, no wisdom, no goodness, which may be given to those who pray for them—nay, not the power of God Himself—can prevail against their stubborn frowardness. For there is nothing which brings out so clearly the greatness of man in the universe, and with it the terribleness of what may befall him hereafter and for ever, as that he can stand alone against God; that he can, with angry dislike, say "*no*" to God; that he can set himself within the edge of the region of His will, and say to the Omnipotent, "Hitherto shalt Thou come and no further"; or, what is even more

strange, that he can keep closed the door at which the love of Christ waits to knock. It is indeed an awful fact that we can not only grieve, but overcome in resisting, the Holy Ghost, and do "despite to the Spirit of grace."

Let it, then, never be thought that it can be hard unwillingness in the Father to take back the prodigal, any where or at any time, which makes so terrible the doom of one whose apostasy has been neither thoughtless nor ignorant, nor only of the understanding. It is he himself who will not return, who mocks the Holy Spirit when He would persuade and enable him again to think aright of Christ, and who turns in anger against those, once his brethren, who have brought to him, if he would only take it, the life which God had given them for him in answer to their prayers. Our Lord saw with grief that men could thus shut themselves out from Hope when He spake of those who had "closed their eyes, lest at any time they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and should be converted," so that He might heal them.[1] The dread lest he should be converted, felt by one who, having tasted the heavenly gift, knows what conversion means, and the set and steady purpose of heart to struggle against all that could lead to it, seem to show that the gulf is already fixed across which there

[1] Matt. XIII. 15.

will never more be a going back of the heart to God. The field which will no longer grow the herb for the use of man, which for a time had thriven in it, will not accept the same plant when its seeds are freshly sown. In vain does it drink in "the rain that still cometh oft upon it"; for the good ends it once answered it is thenceforth barren—it will now bear only thorns and thistles, and is "nigh unto a curse."

So may there be among us some who, for a like reason, are "nigh unto a curse." But because they are only nigh unto it, and not yet under it, St. John would not forbid us to pray for them. His words are—"*Not concerning such do I say that request should me made.*" It cannot be made with the large hope that goes along with prayer for those who have never really cast off Christ, but still are, we may believe, in heart clinging to Him, though they have been foolish and weak and wicked, even to the point of denying Him. For them we, nothing doubting, may well pray, as Christ for Peter, that their faith may not fail, and that when they are again converted they may be the means of strengthening ourselves.

For those who, like the Antichrists, have gone so far astray, St. John may have felt that he could not pray with any hope, and therefore he would not lay on those to whom he was writing a duty which they, being like him hopeless, could not

really fulfil. If we too have the sorrow of meeting with any who have so chosen evil as their good as to be sinning heart-sins against Christ, let us by all means pray for them if we can. Let us be very slow to lose all hope of them. If it be for ourselves that we are afraid, dreading lest the sin of the Antichrists may have been ours, let us remember that he only has sinned unto death, in St. John's sense of the word, who cares not though he should have died. If we still can feel and still repent; if the truth God has revealed be still dear to us; if we still cling to Christ as worthy of our love, though we know, it may be, that we have denied and even betrayed Him, and had heart-risings of impatience with Him; if we can ask pardon of God,—then let us be very sure of this, that "whoso cometh unto Him He will in no wise cast out."

Chap. V. v. 18.

We know that whosoever is begotten of God sinneth not; but He that was begotten of God keepeth him, and the evil one toucheth him not.

St. John wrote this Epistle, as we have seen, for this end, among others, that he might make it clear to his children that there is a spiritual world, and that everything in it is a fact, a reality—not a fancy or an opinion. He also is careful to show that sin

has no place in the Christian life, and therefore that a man, in so far as he is a Christian, or, in other words, in so far as he is in harmony with the universe and in fellowship with God, does not sin. And throughout it has been set forth that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that it is through Him that the man who has sinned is saved from the guilt and the power of sin. The first of these aims takes in the other two. Sin is a reality—a fact; and not less real is the Divine might of Jesus in the spiritual world in which He works, and will go on to work, until selfishness, which is at the root of all sin, is banished from it, and a love like His own to God and to man has taken its place.

Now that his Epistle is all but ended, the last words of St. John to his children must carry to them his hope that they, in fellowship with him, have taken into their minds the knowledge of these great truths as he had tried to give it to them. "*We know,*" he writes, you, I trust, as well as I *know*. He uses the words "we know" three times, as if he said,—There are among the stores of our knowledge three truths never to be lost sight of. Let us keep them very near us, close to our hand, ready for hourly use. These are not doubtful truths, needing to be weighed, and so to have their worth settled. They are not even to be only *believed* by you. They are truths you *know* and of which you are quite sure.

There are some truths of which we are more sure than we are of other truths. We are not used perhaps to take note of this. We do not draw out a list of truths, marking on it the strength or the weakness of the hold which each of them has on us; yet our whole lives are spent in weighing truths against each other, and each thing we do while we live is a sign of the value which, without knowing what we are doing, we have come to put on this truth or on that. Each piece of knowledge, which we believe, we call a truth. But we give it that title only, it may be, because it seems to us more likely on the whole to be true than false. A truth of this kind has no right to an unmovable hold upon us. The worth of anything we believe, and its right to a firm seat in our minds, grows with its likelihood, until at last we see that there are some few truths, about which no doubtful question can be raised, for with them certainty has taken the place of the highest likelihood. Of such truths we do not say "I believe them," but "I know them." Truths then that are known, and not merely believed, are of the greatest worth and power. They rule all other truths, and that so strictly that these other truths have power within us only when the master truths allow them. The seat within us of truths that are *known* is thus firm; while that of truths only believed is ever more or less liable to be shaken or upset. What we know we always

know; what we only believe we may at any time cease to believe.

There were many truths of which St. John no doubt was sure. Truths which he knew. Of some of those he has already spoken in this chapter. But among them there were three, the strongest to him of all, and the rulers of his life. These he wishes to rule the lives of his children also. They are as he here sets them down. First, that the Christian does not sin. Next, that the Christian is of God. And lastly, that One, who is none other than the Son of God, has really come into this world. He thus begins by giving this place of highest certainty among the things we know to the fact that "*whosoever is begotten of God sinneth not.*" He has already urged this truth upon us in more than one place, and in almost the same words. In Chap. III. 6, "Whosoever abideth in Christ sinneth not," and in v. 9, "Whosoever is begotten of God doeth no sin."

There is no need again to go over the ground which, when these verses were before us, we searched for the Apostle's meaning in them. What we have chiefly to mark here is the great value he puts on this truth, raising it to the rank of the first three among all truths, and even putting it above the other two. Not less forcibly than St. Paul, when he set charity as chief among the graces, does St. John make us feel how very high is the

place of holiness in the Christian life. It is, he thinks, above all things needful to know and to be sure that without it "no man can see the Lord," and that it is up towards sinlessness that all truths found in the Gospel have it as their best work to lead us. There are many Christians who do not see this clearly enough. With them, the taking away of sin by God means little more than the pardoning of it. The dread which had fallen on them, when they saw what is meant by the guilt of sin, and what the awfulness of death and judgment, has led them to seek, above all else, escape from the master pain of fear, and to feel that if, through some belief in truths about Christ, this dread is lifted off, then their faith has done all its work. It was for this they wished, perhaps it was all for which they had been ever taught to wish; and this they had got. As for sin itself—as for the escape of the soul from all bondage to its power—that they had not seen, or but dimly seen, to belong to the work of Christ. He lifts the soul of the believer out of eternal pain into eternal pleasure, and what more could they wish Him to do. They have not seen that to abide in sin is to be in hell; and to abide in love is to be in heaven, with its fulness of joy, with the glory of being in it like Christ, and of knowing Him "whom to know is life everlasting."

To those who think much of the punishment of

sin, and not much of sin itself, St. John never ceases to speak with the strongest warning and the strongest words. Christ is indeed the propitiation for our sins, and in Him we have an advocate with the Father: but let no man ever forget that these great truths but pave the way by which we reach the greatest truth of all—the truth that Christ has come, and lived, and died on earth that He might take away our sins, so as in the end to make us like Himself: righteous as He is righteous, holy as He is holy. In Christ Jesus we are "created for good works."[1] The Christian must "put on the new man, which is created after the image of God in righteousness and holiness of truth."[2] Therefore, in so far as he is renewed by his birth from God, he does not sin. "*Whosoever is begotten of God sinneth not.*"

St. John goes on to say that in this growth in grace—in this going on from strength to strength in the divine life—the child of God is with care watched and guarded by the living Christ. It is not the chief aim of our Lord to give us peace and joy in believing, but rather to keep us from sin and from falling before temptation. Instead of having nothing but peace, we must sometimes fight for the life of our souls. Therefore, although the Christian is often lifted into a region of calm light, yet for the sake of his greater holiness he is sometimes

[1] Eph. II. 10. [2] Eph. IV. 24.

cast down thence into depths, in the darkness of which he has to wrestle with the strength of unseen foes.

That Christ, who has the keys of hell, watches these struggles and cares for the life of each of us who believe on Him is a truth taught here by St. John, but lost to us by the Authorised Version, in which the child of God is made his own saviour. "He keepeth himself," it is said. The Revised Version gives the true sense of the Greek by making a small but weighty change in the words. In it "*was*" stands for "*is*" and "*him*" for "*himself*." "*He that was begotten of God keepeth him.*" That is to say, the great Son of God, who was in such a sense begotten of the Father as that the title of Son belongs to Him as to none other—He keepeth the child of God who, by reason of weakness, could not keep himself. Thus it is that Christ fulfils His great promise to His sheep. "They shall never perish," He says, "and no one shall snatch them out of My hand." Or, as here, "*He keepeth them and the evil one toucheth them not.*"

By what means Christ keepeth His people from sin can be gathered from what each of them remembers and knows. Those of them, above all, who have lived long in the world, can never forget the dangers to their souls from which they have escaped, through no wisdom or strength of their

own, but clearly through the nearness to them of a power which they afterwards saw to have been that of their Saviour Jesus Christ. As one who in the dark has made his way along a dangerous path goes back on it when it is light, that he may see what were the perils he had run, and shudders to find his footprints skirting the edge of more than one fatal chasm, so is it with the Christian who looks back on his life. Here is the place where a bottomless pit had opened its mouth for him; here is the point where, had he turned in the least aside, he must have stumbled and fallen to his death. Thankful wonder fills his soul. Goodness and mercy must have been following him and watching over him and he knew it not. Perhaps he has much grief for some who set out with him, but who had wandered in the dark mountains, so that he saw them no more. But for himself—What shall he render to the Lord for all His goodness to him?

There are few Christians who have not passed, once at least, through the valley of the shadow of spiritual death, fewer still who had light in it all the way. Nothing makes so clear to our faith the care of a living Saviour and His nearness to us in the world as the fact that, by a power we know to have been not our own, we have been kept from some sins. There are points in the lives of most of us at which we see that we can have been guided

to safety by nothing else than the counsel of God. Whence comes to us a fresh and living hope of being yet received into glory. But who can tell by what dealings of His providence, by what strivings of His Holy Spirit, by what mercies giving rise to love, by what chastisements driving from folly, by what helps, by what hindrances, God has guided us past the horrible pit, and kept us from sinking in the miry clay, so that we continue unto this day? Christ alone knows all that He has done for us. But we can see enough of the way by which He has led us to believe St. John, when He tells us that it is the mighty power of God our Saviour which has kept us, and that but for Him we must long ere now have died the death.

Many of us feel and know this ourselves. But, apart from the teaching of our Lord and His apostles, we could not have known that our need of the Saviour's help was so great as it is. Our great spiritual foe, the evil one, with the view perhaps of hiding from us the fact that there is any spiritual world, keeps himself so hidden, and works for our ruin so covertly, that we could not have guessed that such a danger as from him was ever threatening us, were it not for the hope that some at least of the evil thoughts, which seek a place in our minds, were not really our own, but come to us from without. As it is, we know as a fact that we have this enemy—a spirit of some kind, unseen,

able to make his way close to our spirits: not all-wise, but armed with a knowledge of all that is weakest in us, gathered during many thousand years, yet without which he was able to drag down, from their state of good, our first parents. Terrible in this, terrible also in his pitiless and unchanging will, to deface in us all that he can find of the image of God, and still more to be dreaded because he still keeps as his that within us of the old nature, which, even though it be half dead, will yet, with its latest strength, open to him a way into our heart. There can be no escape from the fear of such a being, save in the belief that we are watched by the sleepless love of Him who sees what we cannot see—that "*He who was begotten of God keepeth us, so that the evil one toucheth us not.*"

We know that, for the sake of bringing our faith into healthy use, and so strengthening it, this evil one is allowed to come near us so as to tempt us. But it is not of the temptations that are common to man, and which we feel every day, that St. John is here thinking. It is not of a fiery dart, cast at the soul by Satan, that he speaks; but of his touch, when armed, so far as we can see, with no dangerous weapon he comes close to us and works subtilly. There is a touch, like that of a limed twig on a bird's wing, that catches hold, and clings, and disables. Such is the touch of Satan; and some of us know what it was, and what came of it. Such

the evil thought that slid into the soul, that fastened itself on us, that crept round us as if for a surer hold, that entangled us as with the meshes of a net, that laid us wretched and helpless at Satan's feet. Who that has felt that touch can ever forget it? Or the joy, as of awakening from a fatal dream, if having faith enough left to seek with strong crying and tears to Him, who came to destroy the works of the devil, we found the bonds straightway broken, and the soul set free. He only who has passed through such misery and joy can understand the rest there is, and the peace, in believing that He that was begotten of God now keepeth him, so that the evil one shall in such sort touch him no more.

We cannot doubt that, when St. John spoke thus of the guardianship of Christ against the touch of Satan, he was thinking of what his Lord had said of the sheep given Him by the Father. "No one," He said, "shall snatch them out of My hand." St. Paul too must have recalled these words; for it is on the faithfulness of God that he founds the hope held out by him to the Corinthians, of never being tempted above what they are able to bear.[1] These words of our Lord and of His apostles may well save us from all benumbing fear of the evil one; but they would be a curse to us if they took from us a very wakeful sense of danger from him. We

[1] Cor. X. 13.

still have to watch and to pray that we enter not into temptation. We are not told that we are never to be attacked. Christ, in His keeping of them, does not put a fence round His people which the tempter cannot scale. He shall not lay on them that deadly touch which leaves them helpless in his power. Neither he nor any of his shall pluck them out of the hand of Christ. A way of escape shall be opened for them when the evil one seems to have them safe in his toils. But they themselves must see and feel the greatness of their danger. They themselves must shrink back as it were into the shelter of the hand from which Satan would snatch them. They must themselves take the way of escape open to them, fleeing from sin as if the avenger of blood was behind them. Satan cannot pluck them out of the Saviour's hand, but may they not, like Judas, pluck themselves thence? The door may be opened to them through which lies the way to the light and liberty which are beside God, but they may turn from it. Christ may have been seen to stand between them and the tempter, warning and beseeching them, yet against even His voice they may harden their hearts. For to us men, made in the image of God, belongs the awful power of setting ourselves against the will of Him who would have all men to be saved. Satan is not our only tempter, or the only spiritual foe we have to fear. We may dread ourselves even more than we

need to dread him. Not for a day must we cease to watch ourselves, lest we should find that gaining new strength within us is the evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God.

Chap. V. v. 19.

We know that we are of God, and the whole world lieth in the evil one.

This is the second of the great truths which St. John hopes will be not only believed by his children, but known to them as certainties never to be forgotten by them. Never, as if he said, let go the great truth that "*we are of God, and that the whole world lieth in the evil one.*" At first we may think this saying to be hard and full of Pharisaic pride. No doubt the words of it may be used in a sinful spirit. It may be that men, who thought themselves Christians, have felt and even said that the wickedness of the world and the misery awaiting those who are of it give, when it is thought of, a zest to their own sense of safety in Christ. This may be, for there is nothing so bad but that self-called Christians have thought it or done it. But against such a thought, should it ever come near us, we must guard ourselves as against a temptation more dangerous than if the state of the world forced on us a doubt of the love

of God. At the same time, what St. John here says we know to be true. As Christians, we cannot but acknowledge it to be true. Nor could we thoughtfully wish that it was not true, or that we did not know it to be true. We feel that we should be driven, without rudder or anchor, into a shoreless sea if we lost hold of the truth that we are of God—that there is a God—that He is not other than we have taken Him to be—that He sees good and evil as we do, only more clearly, and feels about them as we feel, only more strongly—that His aims are the same as ours, only of a far wider and further scope—that we are thus on His side—with Him—of Him. To think otherwise, to feel that the side we try to take in upholding good and eschewing evil, is not the side of God; that our notions of duty are not His; that our conscience is not at one with Him; that He does not care whether men are good or bad; that, in short, the world in not knowing God is right, and we wrong. To think thus, to feel even for an hour that we are standing solitary in the universe, with nothing above us or around us but power and heartless wisdom, with no Heavenly and Most Holy Father to uphold us, no Christ to love us and keep us,—words fail to express the dread, like none ever felt by us, save in an evil dream, which would scare us if we did not know that "*we are of God.*" We cannot wonder that St. John set this among the

three great truths which his children cannot but know.

Our heart is indeed heavy, and the heavier it is the better for us, when we look round and so are forced to see that, if we are of God, there are very many who are not of Him; that outside of the household of God is the world, and that those who are of it are, as St. John here tells us, lying in the evil one. We cannot escape from this, that, if we are of God, the "*whole world lieth in the evil one.*" If we know the first truth, we cannot help knowing the second also. For, as we have already seen, there is no middle class—none who are neither of God nor of the devil. All have their place, as St. John has taught us, on one side or the other of the narrow line which he draws between death and life, between love or unselfishness, and what he calls hatred. We would fain not be forced to know this. It would save us from much pain could we believe that there were very many who, if they are not the children of God, are yet not the children of the evil one. It would save us, too, from doubts which often assail our faith with great strength. For by no assault of unbelief is the Christian so driven with loss from the outworks of his faith into the inner high tower or keep of it, as by the knowledge that so many of his fellow-men, created like himself by God, are still lying in the evil one—dead in sin. Here faith, knowing what that means,

seems to go over to the side of doubt, and with it for the time goes thither, too, that love for others which ever before had fought on the side of God, so that the soul is hard bestead.

It is vain to say that St. John's words do not now hold true; that when he wrote, the Pagan world, with all its open sinfulness, was lying around him. Many hundred years have passed since then. Christ has been set before more than half the nations under heaven, yet if St. John now stood on any spot in Christendom he might still look round and say to the believers in Christ gathered round his feet, "We are of God, and the whole world lieth in the evil one"—a truth full of unspeakable sadness to him, and surely also to them. Eighteen hundred years ago he had heard great voices in heaven, which said, "The kingdom of this world is become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ," and he had joined with the four and twenty elders who, on this, "fell on their faces and gave thanks to God, for that these things should shortly come to pass." They have not yet come to pass. Therefore to us the temptation is great to say—Where is the promise of this becoming? for since the apostles fell asleep most things continue as they were from the beginning of the Gospel. Nor does it lighten our sorrow to be told that the heavens and the earth are stored for fire against the destruction of ungodly men (2 Peter III. 7). Neither does

much help come from keeping in mind that "one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day." We can only look on the thousand years, as we can see them, and on the millions for whom, during them, the blackness of spiritual darkness hath been reserved.

It is not for us, who think we are of God, and in whom love to our neighbour should ever work, to turn away from such a scene, and with a whole heart to speak lightly of the sovereignty of God: for St. John, more than any other, has taught us to think of God as somewhat more than Sovereign. Neither must we follow the counsel of those who are driven, by the painfulness of what they see in the world, to preach, as a gospel, the final annihilation of the wicked. What we as believers have to do, when crushed with the dread lest at any time mercy should be clean gone for ever, is to betake ourselves to the sanctuary of God, not that we may then understand in the Psalmist's sense "the end of the wicked," but that we may then look again and yet again on Christ, and be saved, by what we certainly see in Him, from the doubts of the love of God, which, were Christ not to be seen, would cast us down into the hell of a hopeless unbelief. There is indeed "no other name given under heaven or among men whereby we can be saved" from it but the name of Jesus only. If He be, as we know Him to be, the Son of God; if God did

not spare Him, and we know God did not spare Him, but gave Him up to the death for us all, we cannot, we dare not, doubt the love of God. When something that happens near us forces on us the fact that the world is lying in the evil one, it is indeed our only refuge to make our way into that fastness of our faith which is opened to us in Christ, for only there can we hold fast the knowledge of the truth that God is love and that God is wise, and that His purposes with mankind shall ever stand, and that with them, "He will do all His pleasure." There, beside Christ, we feel that when the end comes, but not till then, we shall see, in the strange dealings of God with the world, only the greater cause to adore the wonders of His counsel and the excellence of His working. God can and will bring to pass all that is good and righteous, in a way perhaps as strange as that which must have filled with wonder the angels when Adam did not die on the day he ate that fruit, and when thousands of years afterwards they saw God set forth His only begotten Son as a propitiation, that He might show His righteousness in giving life, instead of death, for the "sins done aforetime" (Rom. III. 25).

We would fain believe that, looking in this direction, some dawn of light may be seen for the many who have been, and still are, lying in darkness and in the evil one. Good men have thought that St. Paul saw it when he spake of "the dispensation of

the fulness of times," when God "should gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and are on earth"; or when he tells us that "as in Adam all died, so in Christ shall all be made alive." Even in the very silence of Scripture about this, some comfort has been found, as if God thereby called on His children so to trust the love and wisdom which they know to be His, as to believe that no soul which He has made shall in the end perish. That it may be so, it is hope rather than faith that sees—much as faith urged by love and hope strives to see—this dawn of light. But even hope becomes weak when we hear Christ Himself say of a sinful man "good were it for him had he never been born."[1] For if a man is at the last to pass into unending blessedness, then the ages of sorrow which he may have borne are not worthy to be compared with the eternal glory that follows them. Good indeed would it be at the last for even such an one to *have been* born.

To St. John the truth that the whole world lieth in the evil one must have seemed far less gloomy than it does to us. The world was to him embodied in the Roman Empire, which he saw passing away, with all the lust of it. Already coming down out of heaven from God was the new Jerusalem, "made ready as a bride adorned for her husband." The tabernacle of God was now with man. The Son of

[1] Matt. XXVI. 24. See, however, marg. Rev. Ver.

God had come, and by Him all things were now to be made new. The Roman Empire fell long ago, but the selfishness on which it had rested did not die with it. Men still will be takers and not givers, masters and not servants. Strength, and wisdom, and knowledge, are to be used by such men to build up each his own wealth and power; but of all that he has, or can grasp, nothing shall be used for another's well-being, unless it be paid for. It is this spirit of self-love which is the mark of the world; and all who are of it, or given up to it, whether they be within or without the visible church of Christ, are lying in the evil one.

It is indeed most needful that we here keep in mind that the Gospel knows nothing of any of the lines which men have drawn between the church and the world. The boundaries of the church of Christ are not those which men have marked out by rivers or mountains or coasts, or by a fence built of the many words which make up a creed, still less by the walls of the narrow room in which uncharitable judgment and spiritual pride meet together. We may be very glad that no Christian is in duty bound to take the place of God, and draw any line which shall take his neighbour into or keep him out of, the fellowship of God. We cannot draw that line, nor may we try to draw it, unless we would break the law of our Master, which forbids us to judge, lest we ourselves be

judged. The foundation, on which the church stands secure, has still on it the seal which St. Paul saw there, "*the Lord* knoweth them that are His."[1] He alone, who seeth the heart and knoweth all things, can safely judge with whom, or with what, is the fellowship of a soul. When we see only blindness and error, He may be watching the hidden man of the heart creeping, as it were, slowly through the darkness, towards the only spark of true light which had ever been held out to him; and on the other hand, as we know, it may be the man to whom we give a high place because he is standing out in the full blaze of knowledge—the man who approves the things which seem most excellent, who himself is confident that he is a guide to the blind and a light to them who are in darkness, who has even cast out devils, and done many wonderful works,—he may be the very man whom Christ will one day drive from His presence as a worker of iniquity. We cannot, we dare not, judge our neighbour by what he says he believes, or says he does not believe.

The words, however, which the Son of Man, while yet on earth, thought of Himself as uttering when on the throne of His glory, give us a test by which we must not only try ourselves, but by carefully using which we may venture, if need be, to pass a judgment on our neighbour who professes to

[1] 2 Tim. II. 19.

believe in Christ, though for this we cannot be quite sure of our fitness. For as there are hours when a man, lest his silence should be misunderstood, and some honour thus lost to his Saviour, must say in the face of the world, "I am of God," and "I know that my Redeemer liveth," so are there times when he would fail in a clear duty to some one beside him, if he did not say to him, or even of him, that his iniquities, his evil ways, show to all who know of them that he is not of God—that he is telling a lie to his own soul if, because of what he says or thinks he believes, he reckons himself to be of God through Christ. St. John has written this Epistle in vain, if we do not see that he, as well as St. Paul, saw graven as a seal on the foundation of the church, not only that God alone knows who really are His, but also that a clear departure from iniquity must be the mark upon any one who names the name of Christ as his Saviour.[1]

Those who are of God have not indeed reached here on earth a spotless holiness, but they have made good their *departure* from iniquity. They are not yielding themselves without a struggle to the sway of Satan. They are not lying in the evil one, contented and self-satisfied, wrapped in sin as if asleep or dead. They have risen up at the call of God, who has offered to give them life, and they are fighting for it with that evil one, whom they

[1] 2 Tim. II. 19.

now see to be a deadly foe, and in these conflicts they have sometimes overcome. If then we see any one who calls himself a Christian giving himself up to any sin, never trying to break away from it, but with an easy mind lying, as it were, in it, then we are not to be blamed, but rather praised, if, being purged of all bad feeling towards him, we speak the truth in love, and tell him plainly that he is not of God. Our Lord tells us to do this even when the sin has been wrought against ourselves (Matt. xviii. 15); and if at the last he repent not, we are to treat him as an outcast from the family of God. St. Paul also (1 Cor. v. 12) chides the Corinthians because they had not judged a man who was named as a brother. If such an one is known to be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or an extortioner, with him they are to have no company—no, not to eat. They are to put that wicked man from among themselves. Yet not with hopelessness—not as if his spirit might not be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus. His return from the way of sin is to be watched for, and welcomed with forgiveness and fresh strength of love (2 Cor. ii. 8).

As for those outside the church, those who have never been named as of the Christian brotherhood, who do not say nor think that they are of God, or have any knowledge of Christ—with any judgment on them we have nothing to do. God alone is their

Judge (1 Cor. v. 12). He only knows who of them, if indeed any of them, have, by the work in their hearts of His Holy Spirit, been brought within the range of the pardon purchased by Him who is the propitiation not for our sins only, but also for the sins of the whole world. Here God stands apart from us, and gives us no place for opinion, far less for judgment. But when we have taken our right place, we still see thence, and cannot help seeing that countless men, all over the world, are lying in the evil one. What most of us know to have been once true of ourselves, is clearly true of them. They are without God and without hope.

The change in us, which made us to be now of God, came by faith; our faith came by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God. Ages ago our forefathers were as the heathen now are. To them came men who were of God, who believed that into this world the Son of God was come, as Himself life to dead souls; and full of a Christlike pity for those who were lying in the darkness of death, they brought to them the Word of life. That which moved these men to seek the good of those, through whom has been handed down to us the truth, with all the endless good that goes with it, should strongly move us also towards all who are without. To hope that God will one day, and in some way, save all the heathen, that have been and that are,

may be the outcome of a love for others which has been learned from Christ; but that He has done so, or will ever do so, apart from the labour of His children, is not taught us by the history of the world, or by the Word of God. Life, whether of animals or of plants, has never been known to have had its beginning in death; and it is so with spiritual life also. Nowhere on earth, so far as we know, has the knowledge of the true God sprung up in the soul of any man in which the living seed of the Word had not been sown. That seed may have been small as a grain of mustard. A few words, heard by men who did not seem to listen, may be enough. If in any such way the Word of life fell into good ground, there begins a growth which springs up into everlasting life.

It would seem, then, that it is because life can come only out of life anywhere—this being part of a far-reaching law laid on the universe by the Almighty—that our Lord's last charge to them to whom He had brought life was to go out into all the world and make every creature partake of it. This is His will, and we dare not put in place of it hopes or fancies of our own. Little real faith, therefore, in God have they who would do nothing for the enlightenment of the heathen. A Christian duty was never so changed into a heinous sin as when men turned trust in the boundless love of God to a lost world into a reason for not trying to

do anything themselves to save it; or when humbly leaving, as they would say, the times and seasons in the hand of God, they would give it up to darkness, as if it became not their weakness to aim at what God in His strength was clearly not yet wishing to be done. Few men openly give such reasons as these for their heartlessness towards Christian missions; but there have been, and still are, those who have this inner feeling, that meanwhile it is better for the heathen not to have Christ set before them, lest they should be thus able to reject Him, and so be more surely condemned.

Why God has not arisen in His might, and, by bringing or sending life to the world by whatsoever means, brought the whole of it long since under subjection to the obedience of Christ, is a question which we may not ask with any hope of an answer. No reply was given by our Lord, to what was really the same question, when His disciples asked Him—"Are there few that be saved?" [1] and it is one of the notable marks of that very wonderful unity which runs through the books of the New Testament, that in none of them do we get any light upon it. This only can we clearly see, that the reasons must be strong which have left so unfruitful, as it seems to us, and for so long a time, the work finished by Christ eighteen hundred years ago. No change can have taken place in the

[1] Luke XIII. 23.

mind of God since the day on which His Son was made flesh; no less awful must still seem to Him the misery of man on earth, and his fate if he goes on in sin. The pity He then felt for the lost creature He still feels. The sacrifice He then made for us He would still be ready to make. To us it seems as if all that had now to be done by God for the restoration of sinful man is as nothing to what He has already done. The justice and the truth of God stood, we are wont to think, in the way of His favour to man until Christ died. But Christ has died—His sacrifice has been made. It remains then only that, by some outputting of the power of God, Satan should be bound, and his prisoners forthwith set free. Could not all power and all wisdom do this, and would not all love prompt to it?

It is by such questions as these that the faith of a Christian is now most painfully assailed. For no answer comes to them save this only—"Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" Shall not the Father in heaven do what is really best for His creatures, though we see it not to be best? Shall He that so loved the world as to give His only begotten Son for it be thought to want love for those whom He so loved? Again, then, we betake ourselves to Christ, and again find in Him the only Saviour from the benumbing doubts which, without Him, would master us. Nothing but the

belief that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, and that it was not a creature, but in a real sense His true and only Son, whom God gave up to the death for us all, can lift us to the point from which, with St. John, we can see that God is Love. Thinking of Christ, we can in faith leave with God the things which belong to Him, and turn ourselves to the things that are ours, because God has revealed them to us, that we may go on to do His will, and not spend our time in vainly asking Him why He has not done our will. For surely if we, like the martyr souls under the altar, are crying—"How long, O Master, how long?" the answer comes back to us, as it were an echo from heaven—How long, O servant, how long wilt thou fill thy mind with vain thoughts about the love of God, and leave undone the work for thy fellow-men which thy love for them, if it had been true, would have long since led thee to undertake and finish? Thy doubts are but thin veils wherewith thou wouldst hide the shame of thy sloth.

We have been thinking of the many who are lying in the evil one, and taking it for granted that we are not of them, but that we are of God. Is it so indeed? When we read over this Epistle again, and gather from it the marks by which the children of God are known, what can we do but cease to boast that we are not as other men are? and coming down from our high place range our-

selves with those who are standing afar off, and cry, with as many of them as we can get to join us—"God be merciful to us, sinners."

Chap. V. v. 20.

And we know that the Son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding, that we know Him that is true, and we are in Him that is true, even in His Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God, and eternal life.

The great truths which St. John would have his children ever to keep in mind would not be at one with their lives if, in the joyfulness of them, there was not a tinge of sadness. For the Christian, if his joy is one day to be full, is yet born to sorrow, like all other men; and is indeed more sure of it than they, since his Master has told him that in the world he shall have tribulation, and find in that a proof of his sonship. In the truths therefore which are most surely known to him, he cannot wonder if he finds somewhat of sorrow often rising out of the truths themselves, and often giving strength and reality to the joy which, apart from the sadness in the truths, could not have been felt to be a joy at all. "He that is of God sinneth not" is a truth full of joy for the heaven before us; but who of us does not grieve to feel how far away from us this sinlessness still is? "He that

was begotten of God," His true and only Son, "keepeth us." In this truth we rejoice, but it surely gives us also pain by reminding us of our weakness against the evil one, and of the danger of his touch. "We are of God," and we are indeed glad to believe this to be true; but how sad it is to think of the whole world around us lying in the evil one. And the last of the great truths to be known by us, and never lost sight of—which we now reach—the truth that "*the Son of God is come*"—could give us little joy when we think of how men dealt with Him when He came, but for our sense of sin, but for our knowledge of the danger that threatens us from Satan, and but for the sad thoughts of the many who are lying in him. With these facts as a dark background to it, the fact that the Son of God is come shines out to us with great brightness.

To this fact of the coming of the Son of God into the world we are so used that we do not see how great it is. For as the beauty or grandeur of a landscape is least seen by those who have it always before them, or the happiness of their lot by those who have grown up among the best and kindest friends, so we, who have from our childhood heard that the Son of God was born in Bethlehem, can speak of His birth without change of voice, and think of it without wonder. There are many Christians whose heart the thought of it

has never once touched to the quick; yet we know that among all the things which ever happened in the world, that birth stands quite alone. In history there is nothing like it, or second to it. Other children have come into the world, and changed, before they left it, the life of a nation or the character of an age. Their mark has been made, and left for centuries carved deep on half the globe. But on the birth of the child Jesus all has turned, and for ever, of what is true and is to be true of every being having life who has walked on this earth. The truth is, that it is not always that even a devout Christian takes in and truly feels the sense of the words, "*The Son of God is come.*"

It is strange how unlike, and how far apart from each other, are the doubts which arise from flaws thought to be seen in the proofs of a truth, and those which are felt when one takes in and clearly sees all, or even much, of what the truth really is—when he gets down, as it were, to the truth itself, through the word-wrappings in which it has been brought to him. A man may be quite sure as a fact that Christ was born in Bethlehem, and hold strongly that the Bible teaches that He who was there born is rightly called the Son of God. He may uphold this against all comers, and that with zeal, and yet have as little depth of feeling about the truth itself as about any fact of history with which he has nothing to do. The change is

the widest through which he can pass when the reality and wonder of this truth, now seen in its greatness, comes home to him in such wise as that it seems to him altogether new. It is opened to him by the lifting, quickly it may be, or slowly, as of a veil, from the word "*God,*" and from the words which tell of the coming into the world of one rightly called "His Son." The outward facts, and the old proofs he had gathered of them, are all lost to his sight; they are not remembered nor come into his mind. All that the man had called "faith in the Divinity of Jesus Christ" is overwhelmed, and, as it were, buried deep by the awful greatness of the idea of God, and of God manifest in the flesh. What this means is seen, and all idle fencing with words is given up by him for evermore.

But with what result? It was enough for the Psalmist to look up into the heavens, and see the vastness of them, to feel that it was no simple truth, easy to be grasped, that the God of that great universe is mindful of man, or ever visits him. A man has been known to lie for hours in the snow, feeling nothing, knowing nothing but the burden of the one awful thought that God was with him, and also with each one of the thousand stars he saw glittering in the frosty sky. Such a revelation of truth, bursting in on and scattering all neat array of words about God and the coming of His

Son is needed before we can say with St. John, "*We know.*" We then know at any rate what it is we are asked to believe. We have now to begin over again, and on fresh ground, a search which, because we had got hold of some words, we had thought to have been long since happily finished. The hard forms which our beliefs had taken are now melted into a shapeless fluid, though only, if God will, that they may form themselves anew, not in other, but in larger and more perfect crystals.

It is easy to say "*The Son of God hath come,*" and to prove that these words are rightly used; but to think that out of that silence which stretches all around us and is without bounds, through which move the thousand worlds, each larger than our own—to think that from that Being whose dwelling-place that endlessness is, and who fills it, present in one part of it no more than in another: having indeed no place to be in, such as we call a place, or time, such as we call time—to think that from Him has come to us a Being, who, from that beginning which has no beginning, was with God and was God,—to realize this—to get away from the mere words which vainly try to bring such a truth into view, and to be, as by the Holy Spirit of God, brought close up to the truth itself, so as to see it rising before us in all its greatness and strangeness—overwhelms the soul, as with Isaiah's affright, when he saw the Lord high and lifted up,

and for the time breaks up and scatters all our earlier thoughts and beliefs about Him. As one who, from a distance, has, through mists and broken clouds, seen and made up his mind to climb a great mountain, travels towards it, till at last reaching its foot he finds before him cliffs so high and steep that he hopelessly turns from them, sure that the mountain cannot be scaled; so are there those who, after they have got a true sight of the very first things meant by the word "*God*," give up at once all search for a way whereby they might rise to the knowledge of Him. What they see is not the God whom, when they looked towards Him through words, they thought they knew and understood. This that is before them is hopelessly unknowable. No man can know God, they now say, or anything that is true of Him. That it really is so they honestly, and perhaps sadly, believe. Hereafter, and in another state of being, if there is another state, it may be otherwise, though it may be doubted if the finite can ever, or anywhere, know anything of that which they now see to be the Infinite. Meanwhile it is quite vain to try. God cannot be known.

But there are others who cannot rest on so doubtful a hope. They can no longer think, as they once did, that because they had learned to put in their proper places words about God, and the coming of His Son, that they therefore know God.

There are in Him heights, they plainly see, they can never scale. But that is no reason why they should not spend their lives (why they should not spend their eternity) in seeking and surely finding a little, and yet a little, and ever a little more of what is true of Him. The quest is the most noble they can undertake. Its rewards are from the first the richest on which they can set their hearts.

By what paths this search has been carried on by the countless souls who have not made it in vain, no single one of them perhaps could tell. Each would have his own story. For it is likely that no two of them began it at the same point, or reached the same height by quite the same way. In diverse portions and in diverse manners has each Christian, like the church, scaled the lower steeps of heavenly truth. But at whatever point their search began, whatever path they happened to take, all they who got so far found that each tended towards Christ, and led to Him, as the only way by which they could hope to mount upwards towards the height they longed to reach. In other words, countless men have found that when once they had clearly seen how great above all else is the question "what is God?" they, seeking, if haply they could answer it, came sooner or later to find that not elsewhere than in Jesus Christ could any answer be found. In Him God was to them manifest in the flesh, manifest in human

nature, in the every-day life of man, and therefore to be known and understood by man.

If, then, they are reminded that it was the clear sight of what the words meant, which set forth the fact of this coming of the Son of God, that first broke up the strong framework of words on which they once rested their faith in it, they answer that it is that very infinity of God, which overwhelmed them when first they saw what it really was, which now makes them able to see that He who is rightly called the Son of God was rightly sent by such a God into such a world as ours. We must indeed all give up the hope of knowing what is the manner of the being of an Infinite Spirit, but this is equally true of any kind of spirit. The limits indeed are so very narrow, within which we can find out what anything is, that if we had to do so before we could feel that we knew anything, there is really nothing we could know. Yet we are sure that we know much about many things. Only, if we think about it, we see that round about everything we know there stretches an infinite of what we do not know, that behind every question, which we set aside as answered, we find not one but many questions we cannot answer, and this always and without end. This is, above all else, true of God. Still there are some things about Him which we know so thoroughly, that He Himself cannot know them better than we do. For there are points at

which infinity itself cannot, if we may so speak, be infinite. It is, as we have already seen, meaningless to speak of truth, or of justice, as infinite. If a child speaks the truth, or acts justly, God Himself cannot make its truth more true, or its justice more just. We do not need therefore to be other than we are to understand the truth and justice of God. They are the same with Him as with us. Surely it is much to know this of God.

As for the love of God, if we take it in the sense which St. John gives it, we can see that as power, if it be infinite, is able to do that which is least, as well as that which is greatest, and knowledge, if it be infinite, must know the least as well as the greatest, so love, if it be infinite, must be able to rise to the greatest height of unselfishness, and to go down to the lowest depth of service—to make the greatest sacrifice for the poorest wretch. There can be nothing, whatever it may be, which love which is infinite will not do for those who are furthest from it and least deserve it. Love that could hold back from this would be bounded, and not infinite. It therefore belongs to the infinite love of God that He, inasmuch as He is, in love as in all else, the Greatest, the Best, the Most High (and we can have no more worthy idea of God than this), should, to save the world, send into it Him who is rightly called His Son. Thus the infinitude of God, which at first, when we saw

what it meant, overwhelmed us with the feeling that it could not be true that He sent His Son into the world in the person of Jesus Christ, becomes the very rock of strength on which our faith in that truth can stand unshaken. The love that is infinite could have no outget worthy of itself, if it did not come down to that world, among all worlds, that is least, and to that creature, among all creatures, that was most miserable, most helpless, and most unworthy.

If, then, we can now see that the coming of the Son of God into the world is not only within the grasp of our faith, but is that which we might look for as the fitting outcome or birth of all that we see must be the chiefest glory of Him who is the Most High God on the one side, and of the misery of man on the other; and if, further, we can, with the apostles, see in Jesus a grace and a truth befitting the Son of God,—then may we well believe Him to be indeed "God manifest in the flesh," and thus feel that a large knowledge of God is opened out broadly before us. Our acquaintance with our neighbour is real and thorough only when our work and our place in the world are much the same as his. A ploughman understands the ploughing of another ploughman, a statesman the statesmanship of another statesman, and a man the life of a man, and therefore the life of God manifest as a man or in the flesh. We can know little

indeed of God as the Sovereign of the universe, because we, who are the weak children of a day, have no fellow-feeling with Him in His everlasting ways, in which He doth according to His will in the army of heaven, and deals with the inhabitants of the earth, in full sight of the issues of eternity. But there is no man who cannot understand God when He shows Himself to us in the life of Jesus of Nazareth; and for the best and truest worship we can give Him, for the largest trust we can put in Him, for the warmest love we can offer Him, we need no more. We feel that when we have seen Christ we have seen the Father, and that the sight of the Father through Him sufficeth for the fulness of our joy. Our search after God, if haply we may find Him, is ended at the feet of Christ. "*The Son of God has come,*" and from before Him, as He comes, passes away the darkness of our despair about ever knowing God, about ever being holy ourselves, and about the world ever being raised from its sleep of death in the evil one. In the desert we have found at last a spring of living water. It is but a small spring welling out of a hidden and lowly place in the earth. The water in it has none of the glory which it had when, as a cloud beside the sun, its drops shone with a brightness that mocked our thirst. The cloud has come down from its high place, and gathered itself into a pure basin beside us, so that we have not

to ascend to bring it down from above. It is beside us, where we can put forth our hand and reach it with our empty cup, and drink in life for ever more. So it is with the man who knows that the Son of God is come.

The knowledge of this by itself is enough to fill us with hope for ourselves and the world. God has not forgotten us. He has not left us to our miserable wandering in search of Him. His Son is come; He is in the world. How great then may be the issues of the coming of such an One. What, of all that is best and most happy, may we not look for from Him? Light instead of darkness, holiness instead of sin, joy instead of sorrow, for ourselves and all mankind.

But St. John would have his children again to remember that they are not to look for these issues, as if they were all yet to come. Some of them are to be found now, and in themselves. There our changed lives and characters witness to the work of the Son of God as already begun. He is not only come into the great outer world, in which it may be hoped that He will one day do great things. It is a fact, of which all we are witnesses, that He has come into the little world of each soul that believes, and that each one may see and know that He is using His power, and bestowing His gifts, so that we have the knowledge that Christ has come, apart from the witness even of the apostles.

They had seen, and they have told us what they saw; but we also now see for ourselves. They beheld, and heard, and touched Him, whom they know to be the Word of Life: we have felt Him touching us. They bore witness to us, and we were ready to believe them; but now we ourselves know that He is with us, for He has given us that which without Him we never could have had. "*He hath given us an understanding that we may know Him that is true.*" Thus then we do not believe in Christ only on the testimony of others; we know for ourselves that the Son of God is come, and that what He has given us, the world, now lying in the wicked one, may also get from Him. It was this knowledge that gave life and hope to the zeal of the apostles, when they made their way, few and weak as they were, into the thick of Satan's host, that they might rescue souls from him. And ever since their day, it is in the strength of this knowledge that all those have gone forth, who, taking up the apostolic work, have wrought lasting good for man.

The word "understanding," by which St. John here sets forth the gift of Christ, is not used elsewhere by him. It is therefore not quite easy to know in what sense he takes it. It may mean that spiritual discernment of which St. Paul speaks (1 Cor. II. 14)—that power to receive and know the things of the Spirit, which are foolishness to the

natural man. Or St. John may be thinking of that manifestation of God, made to us by Christ in His life on earth, which enables us to know and understand the Father. In either of these senses it may truly be said that Christ hath "*given us an understanding that we may know Him that is true,*" and St. John has already taught us that, in both senses, Christ has done this. We shall, it is likely, not be wrong if we take him as setting forth the joint result of the manifestation of God made to us by Christ, and of the anointing of the soul by His Spirit. For neither of these by itself gives us the "knowledge of Him that is true." The Holy Spirit does not fill us with that knowledge otherwise than by taking of the things of Christ and showing them to us. On all this, however, so much has been already said that it is needless to go over again the steps by which St. John has led us, from the implanting in our own hearts of a pure and Godlike love, up to the knowledge of Christ as the Son of the true God, who thus through Him is revealed. It is only when the same mind is in us which was also in Christ that we are fit to know what true glory is, and true greatness, and what He therefore must be who is the only true God, because He really is the Most High in that which is most high—namely, in love.

But we not only know "Him that is true," "we are" also, the Apostle adds, "*in Him that is true,*

even in His Son Jesus Christ." Here again we need not go over what has already been said (Chap. III. 24 and IV. 16) of being in God by being in His Son Jesus Christ. Only it is well to mark that here, at the end of his Epistle, St. John has still before him the great truth with which he began it. He felt there that fellowship or communion with God was that which, above all else, each believer must reach. It was that he might bring his children into this, that he wrote what he and the elders who were beside him had seen and heard of the Word of Life. Now, he says that his children had, through what he had written, come to know that they had this fellowship with God. "*We,*" he says—you as well as I—"*know that we are in Him that is true.*"

We can hardly doubt that, in this being "*in*" God, more is bound up than we can now readily, or perhaps at all, understand. The words of Christ, in His great prayer, are clearly before St. John, "I in them and Thou in Me, that they may be perfected into one," "even as Thou Father art in Me, and I in Thee." This seems to mean much more than fellowship in thought and feeling, though, inasmuch as this oneness is to be manifested to the world, that may be all the force which the word "*in*" ought to carry. *That* force at least it clearly has, so that if in sympathy and fellow-feeling we are at one with Christ, seeing things as

He sees them, and judging of them as He judges, then are we in a true sense "*in Him,*" and thus joined in closest fellowship through Him with the Father, and also with each other.

When Christ spake of this union, He had before His mind all who should ever be real Christians as joined to each other in Him, as branches are in the vine, or the members of the body in the head. Outside of Him the world of fallen men has no such bond. They who are of it are at one only in not being at one. Each man in it lives for self, no man for God, or for his neighbour. They are, as St. Paul very strongly puts it (Tit. III. 3), "living in malice and envy, hateful and hating one another." It is to save us from this selfishness that the kindness and love of God our Saviour appeared. By uniting us to Himself, by making us all one in Him, He gives us a bond, which manifests its reality whenever, and in so far as, the great law of love is obeyed, each man loving his neighbour as Christ loved him. It is thus that the unity of the Spirit is kept in the bond of peace, all good being wrought in each by one and the self-same Spirit, who Himself, one with the Father and the Son, is at the same time the bond which unites the believer to God as his Father. Thus is answered the great prayer of Christ; thus is brought about the oneness of the believer with God. Not indeed as if he were lost in God, as a

drop of rain falling into the ocean is lost; but he becomes, as St. Peter puts it, a partaker of the Divine nature. But here we indeed reach the very furthest edge of that region which is open to our search after the truth of our oneness with God through Christ, and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in our souls.

There is clearly much beyond this greater and more wonderful than all we have seen. Of that we hope one day to know more, though never to know all. Meanwhile the answer of our Lord to Philip, when he besought Him to show us the Father, is still made to all who try to force their way into the things true of God, which are outside the revelation made to us of Him in Christ. It must suffice us to know that what we see within the bounds of that revelation, as St. John has showed it to us, is "*the true God*," and that the knowledge we thus have of Him is eternal life. "For this," said Christ, "is life eternal, that they should know Thee, the only true God, and Him whom Thou didst send, even Jesus Christ." All the righteousness, with its unspeakable rest and peace, which belongs to that life is ours, in so far as we come to know, in the true sense of the word, that He is indeed the true God, whom St. John, as fellow-worker with the Holy Spirit, has showed to us in Christ.

CHAP. V. v. 21.

My little children, guard yourselves from idols.

When now we thoughtfully read this Epistle over again, and try to set before our minds and hearts as real all that we have been told in it of God, and of ourselves as having to do with Him, we are surely touched with a keen sense of despair. Who indeed is sufficient for these things? We cannot but think that St. John must have had the same feeling for his "little children," if not for himself, when, having uttered all his message, he read over what he had written to them. It is easy to watch with pleased wonder the heights reached by a mind like his, but very hard to follow such a flight. He with his strong wings had flown upwards whither no prophet or apostle had ever soared. Who of those whom he wished to guide from earth to God could fly after him? He, near the sun, sees us far beneath him labouring to raise ourselves a little way above the low-lying mists in which for the most part we dwell. In other words he knows that there are few indeed who can ever, while in the flesh, see God as he has seen Him.

What then are his children to do? To aim at reaching his point of view and to fail is to lose heart. He is full of tender love for them. They

are his little children. One day, if they "follow on to know the Lord," they will be able to rise to his height. Meanwhile there is one thing they are able to do. To know and understand the true God as he did may be as yet beyond them; but they may set it before them, as their life work, to take care that they adore none other. He therefore lays on them a task which the weakest of them may begin at once. "*Little children,*" he says, "*guard yourselves from idols.*"

So far it comes much to the same end whether we try to go straight to a truth or turn aside with care from all that we see to be untrue; whether we grope for the gem or cast away from the heap before us all that is clearly worthless. We may avoid the evil if we cannot at once find the good to which we are to cleave. So may we come to "know Him that is true" by guarding ourselves from idols.

It may well be that it was of the dumb idols worshipped by the people among whom his children lived that St. John, when he laid this charge upon them, was thinking. For no doubt those who, in their earlier life, had been used to a worship which gave play to many of the lower appetites of man might readily be tempted again to take part in it. But St. John was not thinking of these idols alone, or perhaps chiefly of these. His mind was full of the Antichrists and of the God, their adoration of

whom led them to deny the Divine Sonship of Christ. This God of theirs must have seemed to him as truly formed by man's device as those against which St. Paul reasoned at Athens.

It may seem unfair to speak of these Antichrists, or of men like them, as idolaters. They certainly set up no graven image in any temple made by hands; and the God, whose honour they thought to uphold, they called by the name of the true God. But not the less was He an idol made up of earth-born thoughts. Carvings, paintings, words, or names are all alike symbols of an image formed in the mind, which becomes a god only when it is adored in the heart, as that which, for any reason, seems to the worshipper to be high and glorious above all other, and to which he therefore gives trust, and service, and sacrifice. An idol is thus, as St. Paul says, "*nothing in the world*"; it is to be really found only in the *heart,* and it is an idol there, whose worship is a sin, only when it is lower in character than that which the worshipper might have known and adored.

Hence it is that, if a man worships that which is to him the highest and the best of which, through any manifestation of God made to him in nature or by history, he is capable of forming an idea, he is not to be called an idolater; though the same object worshipped by another man, to whom a higher manifestation of God has been made, would

to him be an idol. We have seen that the Antichrists had ideas of God, which, so far, were not only true but high. Their God, on whom they called by His revealed name, stood far above the unworthy deities of the people around them. He was the King, Eternal, Immortal, Invisible, who from the place of His glory could never come down so as to be seen by men, still less to suffer at the hands of men.

The time was, and in some places still is, where the worship of such a God as this ought not to be called idolatry. Those who, listening to the earlier lessons taught to man by God, had come thus to think of Him, had risen indeed to a high sense of the Divine. But not to the highest. Nor indeed could any rise thither, when as yet the Son of God had not come. But He had come into the world. The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, had, by the grace and truth of His life and death, revealed God to be such an One, as no man, apart from that revelation, had seen, or could see, Him to be. The Antichrists were among those who knew of that life and death. They therefore, like St. John and his faithful children, could have risen to that highest knowledge of God. But, unlike them, they were unable to see any glory, as of the Only Begotten of the Father, in One who could be seen and touched, and who suffered and died. God could not, they said, be manifest in

the flesh. Service and suffering and surpassing love were to them no marks or tokens of the Divine. They would not, and therefore could not, rise above their earlier thoughts of God by means of all that, through His Son, God had showed of Himself to them. Thus, though they might have known God, "they glorified Him not as God, neither were thankful," but gave themselves up to vain reasonings, and set themselves steadfastly to the worship of a god, not, it is true, mean and base, but still very far beneath Him whom Christ had revealed as the Father. Their god thus became to them an idol, and this not the less really that he had many of the attributes of the true God. For there never has been an idol not clothed with some of these by its worshippers; and we can fix on no one idea of God and say that all, of whatever land, or living in whatever age, who do not rise in thought to the height of this idea are idolaters; while all who reach it, or rise above it, are worshippers of the true God. The question ever must be, How much of that which may be known of God has been by any means manifested to a worshipper? For God, as St. Paul teaches (Rom. i. 19), has manifested in all men somewhat of Himself. Do we in our thoughts of God rise up to, or sink below, this manifestation? If below, then are we idolaters. The Antichrists had fallen far below the manifestation made to them in Christ, and it was this that

made them without excuse. "Knowing God, they glorified Him not as God."

We need not go over again what has been already said about the source of our true or of our false ideas of God. We can know God at all only because we were at first made in His image or likeness. Had man not fallen, then the enlarged image of himself, which he would have worshipped as God, would have been the true God. But he has fallen, and so the gods he worships are all enlarged images of his fallen self. They are made like—not to man as God made him—but to corruptible man such as he has made himself. All such gods are idols to those to whom any higher revelation of God has come, and it is from the worship of any such that St. John beseeches his little children to keep themselves.

We may not try to speak here of the many forms which these idols take. What we have to keep in mind is that the Apostle, writing to Christians, goes much deeper than to guard us against "sacrificing to our net and burning incense to our drag" (Hab. i. 16). It is not enough that we see the folly of worshipping the creatures of God which help us to enjoyment and ease—which save us from cold, or hunger, or disease. The time was when men, seeking after God, if haply they might find Him, saw without error, in the forces which work in the world, the tokens of a mighty Presence—of an

energy having, like themselves, purpose and will —to be loved, because "He gave them peace in their borders, and fed them with the finest of the wheat"; or to be dreaded, because He wielded the tempest and the earthquake, and shot forth in His anger the lightning of thunder. It might be well indeed if some who call themselves Christians saw as much of God as even this. For there are those who seem to believe in a future world who have never felt that in *this* world a Person is ever moving behind the forces of nature, and that all things in it, whether they frighten or help us, are in the hands of God, and do His will.

But against idolatry in some shape the warning of St. John is still needed by us all. Not only does it task our spirits, beyond the strength they yet have, to rise with him to the full height whence he saw God. The evil is that we not only come short of his lofty idea of God, but that we go on to mix, with such true ideas as we have of Him, some which belong to our fallen nature. We are sure, indeed, to do this until we are perfectly renewed in the image of God. Then only shall we know Him even as also we are known by Him. It is this that St. John has in view when, as the crowning glory of the heavenly state, he couples together the being like Christ and the seeing Him as He is. Thus it comes to pass that whatever lingers in a Christian of the old man, who is

corrupt, makes so far one-sided and misshapen the idea he forms of God, and must do so, however free from excess or defect the words may be in which he sets forth his idea.

For let it never be forgotten that words are but labels attached to a set of ideas, gathered and folded together in, as it were, a packet or parcel, on the outside of which, for the sake of ready use, a name is written, such as the name of God. This word, however, tells us nothing of the ideas which are hidden under it. Out of a thousand men who use the word, it is far from likely that with any two of them the ideas which underlie it are quite the same; while, again, a word stands for each of these underlying ideas also, every one of which is made up of many others which, if we trace them far enough back, we see to take their real shape from what belongs to the experience and character of each man by himself. Thus it is that no man can be quite sure that he knows what another man means when he speaks of believing in God. Nay, it would be wise in us sometimes to doubt whether we know what we ourselves mean when we use the same words.

Nor do we see our neighbour's mind much more clearly when we, opening up the packet of ideas labelled by him with the name of God, find that the chiefest among them are "highest excellence" and "greatest glory." For it still has to be asked

—What does he mean by excellence, and what by glory? or what are the ideas which, with him, underlie these words, since they may be high, as those of St. John, or even of Christ Himself, or low, as any ever shaped by a mindless savage? It is clear, then, that our ideas of God are really moulded on the forms, if we may so speak, of our own souls, and that it is therefore to the state of the soul that we must look, and on that state we must work, when we strive to obey the Apostle by keeping ourselves from idols.

With this agrees the Word of God when, far above the intellect it sets the heart, telling us to keep it with all diligence, seeing that "out of it are the issues of life"; making it the source from which proceeds all that is evil, as well as all that is good, in us (Mark VII. 4), promising the knowledge of the truth, not to the wise, but to those whose will is set to do the will of God, and granting the vision of God only to the pure in heart. It is the place thus given to the affections which takes Christianity out from among the philosophies, which makes the mind of a child the pattern for that of the true disciple, and shows us how it was that God chose what the world thinks to be foolish things and weak things, and even things which are not, to put to shame and bring to nought the wisdom and the strength of which men make so much.

It is so, indeed, with any god really adored by any man. The wisdom of the wise has little to do with the framing of him, and therefore it is that we do not escape from the risk of idolatry by a weighing, however careful, of the words by which we wish to set forth our idea of God, even if we take from the Bible, and from it only, every word with which we build up our image of Him. For the intellectual work by which we take pleasure in forming Him, such as we think He ought to be, may be, and often is, carried on quite outside of the temple within us, wherein our real god is, as it were, sitting undisturbed by all that we are doing, and into which we ourselves may forthwith go to lay this very work of ours at his feet. For the heart has ever power to deny to a god the place in which the intellect would set him. We all know that this is true. We may frame, and set up, and show to all around us, a finished idea of God, modelled after the pattern shown us by Christ Himself, and, when we have done so, lay it as an offering before our real god, who is none other than vanity or ambition, or some other form of that commonest of all idols—deified sinful self.

But we cannot here go further into truths which, to be fully dealt with, would need, not a few pages, but a large book. Enough has been said if we clearly see that the intellect, by itself, cannot keep us from idols. That work must be given, first to

the conscience, then to the heart. It is after they have taken up the task, and made some way in it, that the intellect may well come in to help them towards ending it. But the conscience must ever be the chief judge of what is an idol, and we must see to it that no lower place is given to the conscience.

No doubt St. Paul, who knew this, knew also, and that the more clearly the longer he lived and preached, that it belongs to fallen men that their conscience, as well as their mind, is defiled,[1] so that such trust in the conscience may sometimes be vain. Whence, indeed, the need that God Himself, by His Holy Spirit, and not by His Word only, should "shine in our hearts" before the truth can be manifest in the consciences of any, and the light of the Gospel of the real glory of Christ, who is the image of God, can dawn upon them. Our heart, like that of Lydia, must be opened by the Lord Himself before we can keep ourselves from idols.

Still, though this is true, it is no less true that our conscience, such as we have it, is the highest, if not the only, tribunal before which we can bring to be tried any truth which St. Paul or any other asks us to believe about the character of God. St. Paul knew this when he, speaking to the Corinthians with all the authority of an Apostle, felt

[1] 1 Tit. I. 15.

that it was to the conscience of every man who heard him that he must commend himself (2 Cor. IV. 2), and when to the Romans he made it clear that disobedience, even to an ill-informed conscience, is a sin of such a kind that through it a brother for whom Christ died may perish (1 Cor. VIII. 11). Even under the Old Testament, no miracle was allowed to enforce, as true of God, that which the sense of right and wrong denied.

From this it is clear that in guarding ourselves from idols we must begin by taking into our idea of God nothing that seems to us to partake of sin. It is one of the earliest lessons taught us by St. John in this Epistle that "God is light and with Him is no darkness at all"; and we know that He "cannot be tempted of evil," and that "His righteousness is an everlasting righteousness," and that His law sets forth not His will merely, but "the truth."[1] It is His testimony, as the Psalmist calls it, to facts that are eternally true. Thus it is that righteousness is righteousness, not because God so willed it, but God is God because He cannot but ever will that which is righteous. It is on this truth that St. John founds his sense of the Divine glory of Christ; and we are at one with him in this, not so much because we yield our faith to him as an Apostle as because, after he has borne witness to us of what he saw and heard of the grace

[1] Ps. CXIX. 142.

and truth in Jesus Christ, we feel that he was right in giving Him the place of the Son of God. It is our conscience, the voice of God Himself within us, that tells us with highest authority what is or what is not true among the things told us of God.

But it has been said that if we are to believe in any God, who is not a mere idea but a real Being living and working in the world, we must be ready to put up with One whose dealings, either in creation or providence, our consciences will not allow us to think of as always righteous. What are we to say of the forces of nature that deface and ruin so much that has slowly risen to grace and usefulness? What of deadly snakes and poisonous plants? What of the flesh-eating animals, so wonderfully framed to seize and tear the life out of the gentler creatures? What of disease torturing infants? What of sin?—what indeed of sin? It is easy to pile together questions of this kind, and to ask if conscience can uphold as righteous a God who does or allows such things; and if she cannot do so, what comes of the trust we are asked to put in her as keeping us from idols? Nay, it is added, the God of the Bible itself, as set forth in it, seems to do and to command men to do things which, were they done or allowed to be done by ourselves, would be clearly wrong. To each of such questions taken by itself no short answer can be readily given—to some of

them no answer at all. Good men in all ages have been at a loss about them, and have treated them sometimes with wisdom, though often with folly; but never in a way more misleading and untrue than when it has been held, not that what the true God does must ever be righteous, for of that we are sure even though we cannot always see wherein it is righteous, but that every act and command becomes righteous simply because it is His, inasmuch as, since He is Sovereign, He is in nowise to be hindered in doing anything He chooses to do, even though the conscience He has placed in us, and the laws He has given us, judge it to be wrong. In other words, that His laws, among which are those laid on us by our conscience, are not binding on Himself, and are thus the outcome, not of His character, but of circumstances which are thus greater than He. But the mystery which covers many of the ways of God may not thus be solved. Against such an idea of Him the trust to be put in conscience must at any cost be upheld. A God, who may perhaps be unrighteous, is not a God whom any man who has a conscience can worship without sin. He is an idol from which we must guard ourselves.

In doing this the conscience and the heart get some real help from the intellect. Not certainly in all the cases on which the conscience stands in doubt about the righteousness of God, but in so

many of them as to give us large ground for faith in the justice, and truth, and kindness of the Creator and Ruler of the Universe.

By what reasonings, by the bringing forward of what thoughts, this is done, we cannot speak here. Another thousand years of books and sermons will not put an end to all that may be said in justifying the ways of God. But all that can be in them of knowledge, and wisdom, and eloquence, will never be enough to give to any man a clear, unclouded view of Him that is true, unless he also takes in, and believes as true, the facts brought to light by the Gospel of Jesus Christ—the fact, above all, that God so loved the world that He gave Him, who is rightly called his only begotten Son, to be a propitiation for the sins of the whole of it. The intellect may do much, but the final work of saving the soul from the spiritual death of denying the righteousness of God must be wrought by the heart that has found Christ, and clung to Him, and adored Him as the Son of God. For faith, to the man who ventures to think of what may be, in the light of what he knows has been, can never be more than the balance, more or less unequal, of greater and lesser likelihoods. It is the heart which changes belief into knowledge, and which, when touched by the Holy Spirit, gives to the Christian certainty of the love of God.

This it is which gives to the conscience the work,

not only of guarding the heart against one idol or another, but also of so dealing with it, as that it shall be ready to receive into its highest place the true God. The conscience indeed can take up no more worthy task than to watch and teach the heart, which, if left to itself, is foolish, and ready to cling to false gods; but may become so noble in wisdom and truthfulness as not only to rule the whole man with a strong sway, in which the conscience upholds it, but even to reach a keener sense than the conscience itself of what is highest and best.[1] But up towards this the conscience must meanwhile train it, checking it in its wanderings after the false, and leading it to points whence it may see the greatness of the true; and not ceasing from this until at last in His glory Christ Himself is beheld, who, first by His priceless benefits, but above all by what He is seen to be in Himself, so fills the heart that has been guided towards Him by the conscience that thenceforth no idol can reign there. The heart has found in Christ not only the good—not only that in which there is no evil against which it must guard itself—it sees also in Him, the Most High in goodness, rising in righteousness above all beings ever known or fancied. For the Gospel of Jesus Christ sets before us in Him an image of God, made up of ideas such as the conscience could not have created, but to which,

[1] See page 228.

as the highest and the best, it sets its seal with joyful adoration.

We cannot here dwell longer on the great truth that Christ saves us from false gods, though much more might well be said about it. It is enough if we see it ever becoming more clear that from this, as from all forms of error about God (Pantheism being one of them), "there is no other name given under heaven or among men whereby we can be saved but His only." It is, as we have seen, because "*the Son of God is come that we can have an understanding that we may know Him that is true.*"

From all that has been said it now seems clear that the first step which carries us away from idols and straight towards the true God, is to reach a right understanding of the words, "best," "most high," and "most glorious." All depends on the answers which, after careful thought, we give to the questions,—What, among all possible things, is that one thing which seems to us the best of all? What the highest point to which we can think of any being as rising? What the most glorious thing which any being could do?

The answers given by men to these questions are, as we know, of all kinds, and by them may be known who or what the god is of each man who gives them. His answer, if it be true, makes clear, not only his own character, but the character

of the god whom he really worships, for whose favour he longs most, and works most, and is ready to sacrifice most. When the Psalmist says —"Whom have I in heaven but Thee? and in the earth there is none I desire beside Thee; Thou art the strength of my heart and my portion," he uses words which have been spoken to a thousand idols, as well as to the true God.

In any part of the field of history, whether our own or of other nations, we may find clear proof of this truth. Into this research we cannot enter; but at a glance it may be seen that it is not the god of a nation which gives the nation its character as much as the nation which gives its character to its gods. So was it with the Greeks, so with the Romans, so with the old Scandinavians, and so it is with each one of ourselves. Hence, it must be by a work carried on, for the most part *in* us and *on* us, and not only *outside of* us, whether by a revelation or otherwise, that we are brought to a knowledge of "Him that is true." As with St. Paul, so with us, the Son of God, and through Him the Father, must be revealed *in* us, and not merely *to* us.

We thus, then, can see that we escape from idolatry, so as to know and worship the true God, only in so far as we, rising above the things which are beneath, are enabled to set our affections on "the things which are above," that is, on the things, judged by conscience to be, above all others, the

highest and the best—the things seen in Christ as He sitteth on the right hand of God.[1] For, as making our adoration of Him real and true, it is the conscience that judges of the surpassing height of Christ's exaltation, and that rejoices to see Him set, as in His rightful place, "far above all rule, and authority, and power, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come" (Eph. I. 21). It was through his conscience that the glory of this truth was made clear to St. Paul; for there is no true measure of spiritual height, except that used by conscience; no glory that can be allowed to be the greatest, save that to which the conscience gives that place. Power, and wisdom, and sovereignty, all belong to the idea of the true God, nor can we think of Him as wanting in justice and truth. But all these, apart from righteousness in its highest form of love, as St. John saw it manifested in Christ, leave Him without the greatest and most characteristic of His attributes, and without that power over the heart of man beside which the sovereignty of force, whether bodily or intellectual, with all its gifts or terrors, is, in the judgment of an honest conscience, to be treated as weak. We feel, and we cannot help feeling, that to fight, though it be hopelessly, against force is sometimes the very noblest thing a man can do; but to set

[1] Col. III. 1.

oneself against unwearied love has ever, by all men, been reckoned base. We may have seen, in a dream, an omnipotent Being who yet, beside Christ, was, at any cost to ourselves, to be treated as an idol.

Let us then, to guard ourselves from idols, ever set before our minds the grace and truth which are in Jesus Christ, and which marked Him to St. John and to the apostles as the only begotten Son of God. Let us aim at feeling more and more strongly, not only that from His life of service, and death of shame, there comes to us pardon and a place in heaven; but that in that life, and because of the service of it, and in that death, and because of the shame of it, there is a glory which surpasseth all other. Let us aim at this, until it becomes the feeling of each day and of each hour; until worldly glory so loses its brightness as that no sense of the majesty of strength, even in its most noble forms of intellect or imagination, shall ever again blind us to the supreme greatness of love. While we are in the world we shall never cease to be tempted to idolatry, as we shall ever be tempted to sin. For, to one who has known Christ, these temptations are not other, but the same; every sin is to a believer an act of idolatry, and thus of treason towards his Lord. It may help us, whether in guarding ourselves from idols or in our conflicts with sin, to remember that as there can be no

idolatry without sin, so can there be no sin without idolatry; and that therefore whatever of thought, or deed, has ever helped us to fight without loss against the world, or the flesh, or the devil, will likewise help us to guard ourselves from idols.

What these helps are St. John has already told us. The chiefest of them is faith in Christ the Son of God, who having, when on earth, lived a life, and died a death for us, is now living, and really present with every one of us, knowing us by name, touched with the feeling of our infirmities, and still loving us. So long as we thus—to use the Apostle's phrase—"abide in Christ," so long as we never cease to feel the reality of His being, and of the truth about Him as the Most High, we cannot sin or fall into idolatry. Neither wealth, nor honour, nor wit, nor a friend, nor a child, will be able to take the place of God as manifested to us in Jesus Christ.

There is indeed nothing among the things which God has made, and put into the world beside us, to which we may not lawfully give a place in our hearts, and for which we may not be bound to sacrifice much. No doubt some of these are found to be so dangerous, as ever plotting to dethrone God, that the man of heavenly wisdom will strive to banish them utterly from his heart, or to keep them in their place as slaves to do his needful work. But let it never be forgotten that God does not wish

to reign in an empty heart, and to be highest there, only because He is alone there. To a place, only beneath Him in love, many are invited by Him. Neighbour, brother, parent, wife, child, can none of them be loved too much, if only God be loved still more. They would be idols did we sacrifice to them righteousness or truth, but to sacrifice *ourselves* for their good is, as we have seen, the highest service we can offer to God. Therefore let no man be afraid to love, with the thought of Christ before him, all who need love, or to admire all that is worthy of admiration. It is through our human feelings that God reveals to us His highest attributes, and by these that He trains us to the love of Himself. "He who loveth not his brother whom he hath seen cannot love God whom he hath not seen," and "this commandment have we from Him, that he who loveth God love his brother also."

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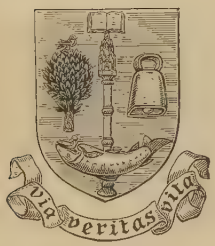

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